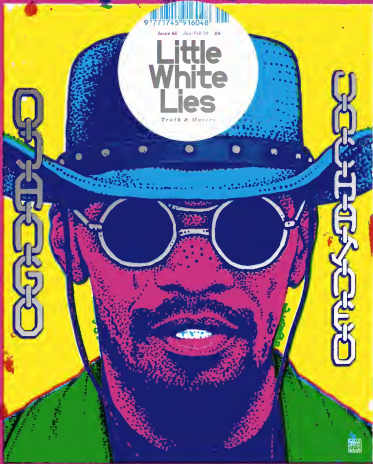


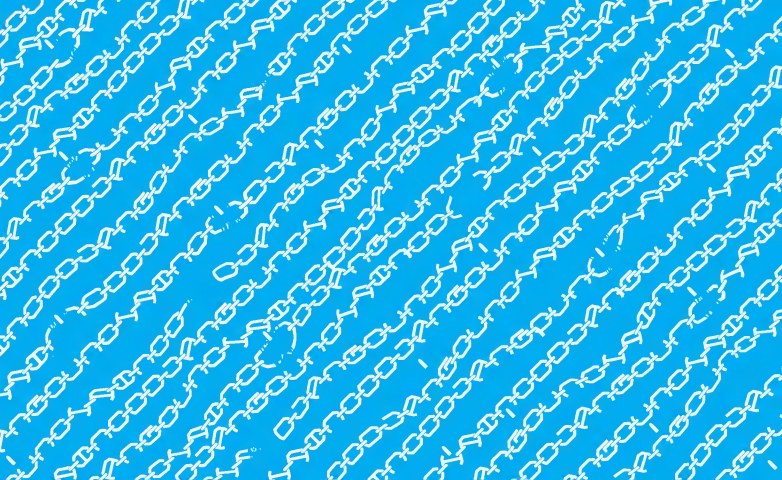
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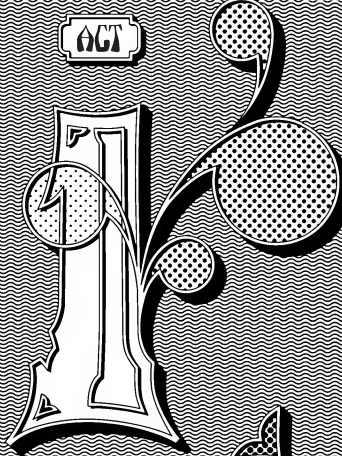
Little White Lies

Truth & Movies





ACT



**"I LIKE THE
WAY YOU
DIE, BOY"**



Django Unchained

Directed by QUENTIN TARANTINO

Starring JAMIE FOXX, CHRISTOPH WALTZ, LEONARDO DICAPRIO

Released 18 JANUARY

HATE, MURDER AND REVENGE AS TARANTINO GOES WEST. WELL, SOUTH.

Laying down his vengeance trilogy after killing Bill and Hitler, Quentin Tarantino's new/old story of 'hate, murder and revenge' takes the title tune from Sergio Corbucci's 1966 pulp-Western about a gunslinger who drags a coffin behind him, but leaves Django's famous pining gun under the lid. QT's movie shoots from the lip.

Reverending to the Deep South of the 1850s means that, for the first time since his colour-coded debut *Reservoir Dogs*, this is a Tarantino film set in a man's world. Instead of foot fetishism and avenging angels, we have Jamie Foxx's scarred slave being freed by a German dentist-turned-bounty-hunter called Dr King Schultz (Christoph Waltz).

So magnificent was Waltz in *Inglorious Bastards* that the film faded every time he stepped off screen. It's a no-brainer move, then, that sees Tarantino push the Austrian actor front and-centre into a hero role here and, sure enough, Waltz's Schultz is another terrific creation: funny, debonair, lethal and three moves ahead of everyone else.

Having become the Vince and Jules of pre-Civil War badlands, Schultz and Django set out to recover Big D's wife Broomhilda (Kerry Washington) from the plantation where they meet their deadly doubles: sadistic owner Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio) and his feverishly loyal man-servant Stephen (Samuel L. Jackson).



Under the pretence of buying one of Candie's 'Mandingos' – slaves who compete in UFC-style deathmatches on his ballroom floor – Waltz engages DiCaprio in a hugely entertaining battle of wits and words in a elaborate con to save the German-speaking Mrs D.

In any language – and he shows off three of them – you could watch Waltz read the phone book and still be captivated. But while no-one could touch him in *Inglorious Bastards*, here Waltz has not one but two equally sharp kids. ★





Quilliting between articulate flamboyance and wealthy rage as the phrenology-obsessed villain, DeCuir has surely not installed himself as Tarantino's newest regular. But it's one of the director's old favorites who graciously steals it from Walt.

On fire behind a facial prosthetic and an elderly stoop, Samuel L. Jackson delivers one of the most memorable performances of his career — trembling, permanently damaged, immensely funny and dangerously savvy. Putting the vile into servile, he's as

annually rich and complicated character. Whatever Tarantino gave him on the page, Jackson has run away with it.



Luxuriously stretched and rebuked by the cast, a centerpiece dinner-table sequence sees all three actors making every word of Tarantino's lengthy dialogue sing like a sharpened Bowie knife. Wonderfully, Tarantino writes his gentlemen killers

Schultz and Gaudin as stinklers for good elegance — garbages must have a concept, hats must not be placed on the table and courtesies are vital at all times.

Even after losing Django with deadly force, Schultz insists on paying for his far and square. On discovering there's been a rise, Gaudin's anger volcanoes not because he's been deceived, but because his two guests have been wasting his time. Sure enough, the film's most catastrophic shootout is triggered by one character's insistence on a handshake after business has been concluded.

This being a Spaghetti dish, QT certainly doesn't forget the red sauce. Blood sprays the walls, bullets split into heads, knives and neither repents, although cartoon kill-shots are paired with a straight-faced brutality that his camera sometimes turns away from. Just as he did with *Bastards*, Tarantino has rewritten history to put right what once went wrong, but while machine-gunning Hitler in a movie theatre was a blast, there's something about Django's violent catharsis that seems surprisingly genuine.

Still, the story loses a lot when it loses DeCuir and Walt, leaving Fox to duck out the film's final payback in methodical fashion. Next to his expertly beguiling garden, the D is comparatively silent, although Fox's shoulders effectively with anguish and rage. And for all its spectacular talk, *Django Unchained* doesn't have anything big to say about slavery (bad) or revenge (good) or anything else really.

You can't take the feeling that Tarantino writes more great scenes than great movies, but the sheer charisma of his cast seals it.

"This being a Spaghetti dish, Tarantino doesn't forget the red sauce"



over the lack of sneaky connective tissue in the script. Centering out over nearly three hours, this is another pulp novella extended to mock-epic length and it's to QT's credit—alongside Waltz, DeCaprio and Jackson—that *Django Unchained* supports its great running time far more robustly than *Inglourious Basterds* did.

It's a film studied with witty touches, from Schultz politely introducing his horses, Fritz and Terry, to the wobbly wobbly tooth that's spring-mounted on the top of his wagon. N-bombs easily outgun F-bombs as Deep South race-relations are mined for *Mean Streets* humor ("It's a nigger on a horse," gasps one smugtown local), along with QT's twists on genre touchstones (Borzo: Leone; crab noons; Broomfield's yellow dress; Waltz and Fox riding through the snow like John Ford's warblers), his unchained musical cues (discovere to hip-hop), his frothy canons (a race one for Franco Nero, a ratty one for himself) and Robert Richardson's bold, beautiful cinematography.

Then the genrebook clears, the villains he is bloody bits and Django's song sends our hero off into sunset. He and Broomfield, claims Tarantino in a typically irrelevant/irresponsible orientalist flourish, are actually the great, great, great grandparents of hip-hop/disco icon John Shaft. For certain, the story of a slave who becomes a bounty hunter is all just a little bit of history repeating. **JONATHAN CHOKER**

ANTICIPATION. *Django* off the way! Then again, it's nearly three hours.

4

ENJOYMENT. War of the words Waltz, DeCaprio and Jackson are indeed off the chain.

4

IN RETROSPECT. Not a masterpiece, but a fun, slick and very entertaining crowd-pleaser.

4



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The collection is available at asos.com
and the 55DSL Boxpark store.



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Lone



Written By
**JONATHAN
CROCKER**

Illustrations By
**PAUL
WILLOUGHBY**

Star

SUNDANCE KID, MAVERICK, SEARCHER, OUTLAW, SHERIFF...
QUENTIN TARANTINO'S INFLUENCE ON CINEMA HAS BEEN
UNDENIABLE. BUT WHEN THE SHOOTING STOPS AND THE DUST
SETTLES, HOW WILL OT BE REMEMBERED? THE MAN WHO SHOT DJANGO
UNCHAINED TELLS EWIES ABOUT HIS QUEST FOR CINE-IMMORTALITY.



ne, two, three seconds. It's the thing you least expect to come out of Quentin Tarantino's mouth: nothing. The question that's stopped him in his tracks is the question we always ask. The only question that matters, really. Turn to the back page and take a look at his answer.

Tarantino loves movies. He loves watching them. He loves reading about them. He loves writing about them. He loves making them. And maybe most of all, he loves talking about them. But ask him to explain why—what is it you love about movies?—and the most famous motemouth in movieland has to stop and think.

"It's funny, because movies have always been my favorite artifact, and favorite form of entertainment, since I was a little boy," he tells EWies. "If somebody was going to give me a cool day where I could do whatever I wanted, usually I would pick some R-rated movie that I couldn't see on my own. I was actually given that choice once by an aunt. Disneyland? Magic Mountain? 'I want to go see *Blazing Saddles*. And you've got to take me to see *Blazing Saddles*!' They were like, 'I can't believe that kid! He picked the movies over Disneyland.'"

That kid will be 50 in a few months. He still picks the movies first. It's just that now the movies have become his Disneyland. "I am living a dream," he agrees. "I am ridiculously lucky. That boy who made *Reservoir Dogs* wanted the life I live. I don't have to pinch myself to wake up. I'm doing it. It's a great feeling. You know, I've got a really nice house. And every once in a while I walk around that nice house and I think, 'Wow, my imagination bought this.'"



It's two decades since *Reservoir Dogs* saw a 29-year-old Tarantino swagger into our cinematic consciousness—in slow-mo, with a lucky soundtrack behind him—and grip greatness between his teeth. But with the exuberant tumble of cine-cool on the brink of a half century and his Spaghetti Western riff *Django Unchained* hitting cinemas, it's time for reflection.

"Oh god, you get to 20 years and you can't help but get reflective," he says. "But now it seems like the whole industry is building up around that. I'm starting to get lifetime achievement awards, they're coming out with a big boxset of my movies and critical retrospectives of the work done so far. So it's all making me reflective about everything." ★



There's an immensely poignant moment in *Bridge On The River Kwai* when Alec Guinness notes, "There are times when suddenly you realise you're nearer the end than the beginning. And you wonder, you ask yourself, what the sum total of your life represents." Just maybe, this is that time for Quentin Tarantino – that brief moment at the top of the mountain where you can see how far you've come and where you have left to go. So what's the judgement?

"Pretty fucking good so far. That's my take on it."

That's all. The interesting thing about Tarantino isn't how much he talks, it's how little he gives away. Right from the start, he's always loved to analyse – was 'Like A Virgin' really about a big dick? – but he won't self-analyse for our benefit. "Well, I'm not really the one to put it in a nice little Easter basket for you and tie it up with a bow," he says. "That's your job."

So, let's start with feet. When Tarantino met Uma Thurman to cast her in *Pulp Fiction*, he reportedly offered her a friendly foot rub. Marcellus Wallace threw *Tony Rocky Horror* out of a window for doing the same thing. Feet are dangerous, sexy things in Tarantino's world. Bridget Fonda's ringed piggies seduce a killer in *Jackie Brown*, Thurman's paralysed toes become screen-killing toys/items in *Kill Bill*. Kurt Russell gives Rosario Dawson's feet a tongue'n'tickle in *Death Proof*. Christoph Waltz minutely undresses Diane Kruger's in *Inglorious Bastards*. And there's QT himself, using a vamped Salma Hayek's foot like a tequila flame in *From Dusk Till Dawn*. We could go on, but you get the picture. He's a sole man.

Not that's he's admiring it today, mind. "If you want to portray somebody moving, you show their


feet waltzing," he shrugs. "It creates a staccato effect – and you're moving – and good! If I had a lot of shots of people where the camera is just past the shoulder, it doesn't mean I have a shoulder lash. You want to see feet? Watch *The Virgin Suicides*. There's a lot of feet in that movie."

"But just to go back to the 20-year thing," he cuts back in. "I'm pretty cleareyed about my own work. I know when I did it and when I didn't do it. But one of the things that really allows me to say, 'Pretty fucking good so far' is I always wanted to be the same director who made *Reservoir Dogs*, 20 years down the line. I'm pretty fucking different from the boy who made that movie. But the director is still connected. You can see the guy who made *Reservoir Dogs* in *Django Unchained*. There's an umbilical connection." But just what is that connection? What have QT's films taught us?




Cinema for Tarantino is not about 'life', as it is for François Truffaut and Martin Scorsese. And yet it has been his life for the last half-century. He was an only child, born when his mother was just 16. After his father Tony left, she raised him on her own – and going to the movies was cheaper than a babysitter. It was the '70s, the great New Wave for Hollywood that saw filmmakers like Hopper, De Palma – and Coppola write a new rulebook for American cinema. Tarantino found some new fathers.

Montage: he quit school at 16 to study acting and took a job as an usher at a hardcore porno theatre, he was arrested for stealing Elmore Leonard's crime novel *The Switch* from a bookstore, he spent his twenties working at the Video Archives that would fuel his famous cinephilia, he came of age as the Sundance kid with snarking debut *Reservoir Dogs*.



**I HAVE
SELF-DOUBT.
BUT I DON'T
HAVE FEAR.
I'M NOT
AFRAID
OF DOING
ANYTHING**





made Jackie Brown, his 'maternal' movie, and the start of six years in self-exile. Now he's doing his way. And as his endless descendants – most recently, Guy Ritchie and Martin McDonagh – keep reminding us, nobody does it quite like Quentin. Reaching back through cinema history – from the Shaw Brothers to Spaghetti Westerns, from Japantomato to Jackass – Tarantino has a unique ability to make everything old become new again. It's much more than nostalgia. He recaptures things lost in the past (it's hard to imagine a QT so fed) by turning them into the future. Foot fetishism? Maybe. Footage fetishism? Definitely.



He's one of our most vital defenders of both film history (saving 35mm from the rise of digital) and film criticism ("What the internet has done is destroy film criticism"). The outlaw has become the sheriff, the teacher and the priest: it's not a job, it's a calling. "I thought, 'If you want to do this, you have to do it with the dedication that a lawyer has towards law or a doctor has towards medicine,'" he says. "The fact that nobody else is making you do it, doesn't mean you don't do it."

Truth is, without QT as our hyperbolic historian, we all would have seen less movies. Would software creepholes ever have nimbled Ringo Lam, Lady Snowblood or Django? Funny how much better you learn when someone is pointing a Hattori Hanzo sword at you. As life rushes carelessly into the future, Tarantino saves us from leaving things behind. Stop. Rewind. Play.

It's not homage, it's curation. Every Tarantino movie is a restoration, a revision and a rediscovery. Everything he touches – songs, actors, weapons, even colours – re-emerges with QT branded lig and

bold on its kids. Django Unchained is a Spaghetti Western only as much as Reservoir Dogs is a heist movie, Kill Bill is a kung-fu flick and Inglourious Basterds is a war film. Genre is a springboard that acrobatically launches us into a space that's very much his own.

He can write dialogue so sharp you could lose an ear listening to it, but few recognise how expertly he controls silence. When he finds an actor who understands the power of the pause, his greatest scenes flex with perfectly judged ellipses that vibrate tension, terror and comedy to tremendous effect. The incredible, riveting opening to Inglourious Basterds as Colonel Hans Landa traps a rat is as good as a gem.

"I do throw scenes that affect the audience," says the filmmaker. "You actually hear noise coming from them. I'm trying to evoke something from them." In fact, it's tough to think of a Hollywood director who's given us more great scenes than Tarantino. But they increasingly struggle to prop up movies that just keep getting bigger.

Where Reservoir Dogs was a lean 99-minute noir, Kill Bill was a whopping 222-page script that spilled over budget before being carved in two. Inglourious Basterds, a screenplay so sprawling that it took 10 years to chisel down, was his longest movie yet at 153 minutes. Django Unchained runs 12 minutes longer.

Worth mentioning, also, that James Cameron is perhaps the only other director in Hollywood who writes such inspiring roles for women – Django Unchained is QT's first film since Reservoir Dogs with a male lead. Cameron once declared to his then-wife Linda Hamilton: "Anybody can be a father or a husband. There are only five people in the world who can do what I do and I'm going for that." You get the feeling that Tarantino would empathise



QT's love affair with cinema has produced eight celluloid children that, though they may not throb with obvious human heart, have unquestionably, irresistibly been made with passion and feeling. From *Marek's Wallace's* heavenly briefcase and helish band-aid to *Kill Bill's* yin/yang credenza, Tarantino wants you to look as closely at film as he does.



Pulp Fiction's Vincent Vega is the brother of *Reservoir Dogs' Vic Vega*. Mr. White worked with Alabama from *True Romance*. *Kill Bill's* basically *Pulp Fiction's* TV show *Fox Force Five*, down to Mia Wallace in the starring role. Eli Roth's Bear Jew in *Inglorious Basterds* is the father of the movie producer Lee Danowitz in *True Romance*. Everyone smokes Red Apples cigarettes.

There's a theory that *Pulp Fiction* is secretly structured in a chronological alphabet of pop-culture winks, opening with a conversation about Amsterdam and ending with that last line, "Zed's dead, baby. Zed's dead." There's an even better theory that all Tarantino's films take place in a world where World War Two ended when Adolf Hitler was machinegunned to pieces in a movie theatre by Jewish commandos instead of chomping a cyanide pill in his bunker. Either way, rewriting 20th-century history so that cinema saved the world is – if not his masterpiece – QT's most audacious stroke so far.

So how does Tarantino want history to remember him? "One of the great filmmakers of all time," he deadpans. But seriously, "One of the great writers of the century."

He's serious. "Why would I not want to be remembered as one of the great filmmakers of

all time?" he continues. "I actually said that after *Reservoir Dogs*. We'll see what happens, but that's what I want. I have self-doubt. But I don't have fear. I'm not afraid of doing anything artistically and I'm not afraid of failing."

Or of retiring. He's already talked about walking off into the sunset after a 10-movie smash-and-grab on greatness. He can see the boxer now – all killer, no filler. He doesn't, he says, want to be Billy Wilder, cranking out an erotic filmography of classics and clunkers. Coincidentally, Billy Wilder died on Tarantino's birthday in 2002. That year, QT was shooting *Kill Bill* and taking ecstasy on the Great Wall of China.

"It's just the idea that I don't want to be an old director, trying to get a job, making crappy movies," he says. "It's not a concern, because I'm not going to do it. Who knows what I'll do in another 20 years? I'll probably be writing novels and film literature and essays." He adopts a Capote-esque accent. "Aaah I become a man of letters."

But for now? More movies. Making them. Watching them. Writing about them. Talking about them. Loving them. "You know what I haven't seen?" he buzzes. "I opened up a copy of your magazine today and there was a big review of *The Devils* inside it. I literally have the video staring me in the face right now! I've had it forever and I've just never seen it. I'm glad that I have interesting holes like *The Devils*, that I can really be excited about."

And so, the great film study of Tarantino's life continues. Three decades on from the video store, his enthusiasm is as youthful as it ever was. But does he ever worry that all this living isn't good for you? This time, there's no pause, no doubt. "Would you ask Van Gogh, does he look at too many paintings?" ☺

On the QT

DON'T BE A S-Q-U-A-R-E. BRUSH UP ON YOUR TARANTINOLOGY WITH THESE HANDY REVISION CARDS...

Quentin's Favourites

FILMS

1. *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) Sergio Leone
2. *Apocalypse Now* (1979) Francis Ford Coppola
3. *The Bad News Bears* (1976) Michael Ritchie
4. *Caddy* (1959) Bruce D. Yellin
5. *Good and Beautiful* (1995) Richard Linklater
6. *The Street Fighter* (1975) John Gilling
7. *Joe Cool Friday* (1960) Howard Hawks
8. *Jaws* (1975) Steven Spielberg
9. *Paper Moon* (1984) G. & S. Rose
10. *Rolling Thunder* (1977) John Flynn

WESTERNS

1. *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) Sergio Leone
2. *For a Few Dollars More* (1965) Sergio Leone
3. *Spargo* (1953) Sergio Corbucci
4. *The Mercenary* (1958) Sergio Corbucci
5. *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) Sergio Leone
6. *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) Sergio Leone
7. *Big Oil Angel* (1947) Joe de Valerio
8. *Death Riders & Death* (1947) Charles Nichols
9. *Hombre* (1960) Sergio Corbucci
10. *The Sudden Onset* (1965) George Seaton

ACTRESS Lee Remick (for all 10 films + *Twelve Angry Men* 1957-60)
 "She's a person, a character and something else - a person."

DESERT-ISLAND DATE *Portrait of a Lady* (the one from the 1966 film, not the 1968 TV series, please)

IQ: 160



HEIGHT..... 6' 0" (1.83M)
 STAR SIGN..... ARIES
 HERITAGE..... CHINESE, ITALIAN AND JAPANESE

FIRST SCREENPLAY:
 CAPTAIN JACK/JOE & THE ANCHOVY SANDS

FIRST JOB IN HOLLYWOOD:
 PRODUCTION ASSISTANT ON DELPH LUNDGREN'S 1967 MOTIVATIONAL FILM, MAXIMUM POTENTIAL

FIRST MOVIE:
 MY BEST FRIEND'S BIRTHDAY (1967)



SHOOT FIRST, ASK QUESTIONS LATER. LIKE NOW. FROM BONNIE AND CLYDE'S BULLET-RIDDLED LAST STAND TO SONNY CORLEONE'S TOLLBOOTH CHECKOUT, REALISTIC GUNSHOT EFFECTS LEAVE A LASTING MARK ON A MOVIE. HOLLYWOOD ARMOURER JOHN FOX (NED KELLY, ANIMAL KINGDOM) AND SPECIAL-EFFECTS COORDINATOR JOHN MCLEOD (DJANGO UNCHAINED, STARSHIP TROOPERS) REVEAL WHAT MAKES A BLOODY, BRILLIANT MOVIE GUNSHOT.

1

A VIEW TO A KILL

"In the early days of cinema, death sequences were more about a hand grabbing a body part and the actor pretending to die," says Fox. "It's evolved into a visual art where the audience wants more action, more danger, so we have to bring it to the current so the audience gets what they want."

2

BULLET TIME

"You need an authentic gun from the period," says Fox. "Spaghetti Westerns use cap-and-ball revolvers, which is correct for the early period. Your classic Hollywood Western tended to always use cartridge guns. You don't see automatic weapons in cowboy movies very often, but Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* is very accurate because the US Cavalry had changed from the Colt sidehunter to the 1911 automatic pistol."

3

GUNS. LOTS OF GUNS

"Period guns do suffer from the gunpowder not liking moisture," says Fox. "In *Ned Kelly*, for example, you had Heath Ledger firing guns towards camera in pouring simulated rain. For that sequence where he's firing one gun in each hand towards camera, I used 12 guns. I'm entirely jettisoned out of frame in my waterproof coat ready to hand Heath a replacement gun the second he gets a malfunction."

4

REEL VS REAL

"In actual fact, it's not realistic to see a lot of blood from a gunshot wound," explains Fox. "In most cases in reality, blood at the point of entry is very minimal. But in movies, the special effect is where the bullet pierces the body. In Hollywood, you have to show a lot of blood." 🍷

Bang Bang

INTERVIEWS BY ADAM WOODWARD



HE SHOT ME
Down
ILLUSTRATION BY STUART PATIENCE

5

BLUE BLOOD

"Many people make their own fake blood, but they tend to use too much blue in their coloring," says Fox. "If you look at old horror movies, the film would be shot and then graded late into a lighter postproduction grey. When that happens, the blood tends to go purple."

6

SQUIBS IN

"Squibs are cardboard with an explosive charge in them, there's no metal in them at all," says Fox. "The Air Squib is an air-powered bullet/insulator used to create the illusion of an actor being hit by a bullet. It won't work on bare skin, so it's hidden on a belt and a special needle is placed on the inside of the shirt where you want the bloody hit to appear."

7

WHAM, BANG!

"We put an explosive charge through a blood bag, aiming towards the camera: a single bullet appearing to have entered the body and the blood bursting through the clothing virtually at the same time," explains Fox. "It's a very simple effect, but if the camera's too close you end up with little glass of blood on the lens, so it's actually quite a fine art."

8

GREATEST HITS

"There are so many techniques used to bullet hit in films over the years," says McLeod. "But as far as body hits on humans, I have to point out the shortcuts in *The Wild Bunch*, the *Godfather* series and the death scene in *Bonnie And Clyde*. Effective, intense and graphic."

9

QUENTIN'S KILLSHOTS

"Quentin was very original in his thoughts about the scenes in *Django Unchained*," recalls McLeod. "He really milled over each and every killing. We ended up with multiple looks and designs ranging from very small hits with a slow trickle of blood to over-the-top, full-blown bloodbaths for the cost."

10

GOING PECKINPAH

"At one point, Quentin told me I'd gone too far on the blood research," remembers McLeod. "But then because the next later in the film he said he didn't want to 'go Peckinpah' on his bullet hits, but I think we surpassed them. It was hard to catch up on all the obscure films he'd mention. I had to not like I knew some of the films he'd bring up, otherwise he'd send me home with the film from his library..."

Little
White
Lies
Presents

THE FILMS THAT INSPIRED DJANGO UNCHAINED

Strip on your suspenders for a blast from the past. To celebrate the release of Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (in cinema on 18 Jan), LWLies has teamed up with MGM HD to showcase eight rare Westerns that inspired QT's new movie on Sky Channel 323. Spaghetti, red stuff everywhere and a sprinkling of pomegran Seville up every night at 9pm. 14-20 January. Head to littlewhitelies.co.uk/ingrid to discover more...



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ADIOS SABATA (1970)

MONDAY 14TH JAN 10 50PM

MAN OF THE EAST (1974)

TUESDAY 15TH JAN 9PM

THE HILLS RUN RED (1967)

WEDNESDAY 16TH JAN 9PM

MY NAME IS MALLORY (1971)

THURSDAY 17TH JAN 9PM

OJANGO KILLS SOFTLY (1968)

FRIDAY 18TH JAN 9PM

**OJANGO AND SARTANA
ARE COMING... IT'S THE END (1970)**

SATURDAY 19TH JAN 9PM

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WORDS BY GLENN HEATH JR

THE
Cowboy
WITH A
Thousand
FACES

ILLUSTRATION BY EYE LLOYD KNIGHT

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE DARK KNIGHT
RISES, POINT BREAK AND MIAMI VICE?
THERE ISN'T ONE. EVERYTHING IS A WESTERN...

Cowboys are complicated souls. They're restless even when they're settled, their violence both even in times of peace. And, most fascinatingly, they seem to ride through every decade and dimension in cinema.

The cowboy has become a constantly evolving mirror for society's best and worst impulses. He brings with him the beguiling emblem of Western iconography – saguna, Stetsons, tin stars and blazing saddles – that continues to emerge in modern movies even as pure Westerns are less likely to show up at the multiplex.

While Clint Eastwood (Unforgiven), Kevin Costner (Open Range) and Ted Harris (Appaloosa) have clung to more classical modes of storytelling, directors like Andrew Dominik (The Assassination of Jesse James by The Coward Robert Ford), John Hillcoat (The Proposition) and Kelly Reichardt (Meek's Cutoff) have adopted a more hallucinatory, surrealist style to explore the darker chapters of Western history from new perspectives.

But the subvert/die/rebirth life-cycle of the Western has only amplified its impact as other more popular genres like the comic-book blockbuster, the modern war saga and the crime epic. If the cowboy does indeed have a thousand faces, it's not surprising to discover that superhero franchises like Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy have draped Western themes over the Hollywood tentpole in their treatment of good and evil.

Bruce Wayne's raging guilt over the death of his loved ones is a direct descendant of the pain felt by former sheriff Bee Shide (Randolph Scott) in Bud Boetticher's 1956 revenge Western *Seven Men From Now*. Like an anarchist liberty valence, The Joker holds inalienable sway over a town

transfixed by fear in *The Dark Knight*. And the stoic rebirth of heroes as mythology in *The Dark Knight Rises* looks all the way back to John Ford's *My Darling Clementine*.

Nolan understands both the natural drama of the genre and the ambiguous corners of a particular human experience, channeling pulp fiction into blockbuster pomp. The entire trilogy's incessant focus on resilience and redemption shows how the Western is lifted just enough from the norm for easy modern co-optation. By adopting a more enigmatic sense of right and wrong, Nolan has redefined the Western for fanboys.

Over the course of her diverse career, director Kathryn Bigelow has also managed to toe the line between Western resistance and action theatrics with mesmerizing results. Beginning with her jaundiced vampire film *Near Dark* and contrasting with ice-cold noir *Blue Steel*, Bigelow deconstructed the typical Western misadventure to challenge what it means to be a professional addicted to your work.

Then came her wave-riding Western, *Point Break*, where a gang of bank-robbing surfers throw off the serene adrenaline from both their swims and their stickups. The lawman that infiltrates their gang, a young gen named Johnny Utah (Keanu Reeves), grows unnaturally close to his targets and faces a moral conundrum when violence becomes a reality.



It's a film that values the closeness shared between men at odds, depicting a dangerous level of intimacy that spells disaster in most Westerns. A similar, albeit more subtly realized internal struggle between a lawman and his prey resonates throughout Sam Peckinpah's masterpiece *Pat Garrett And Billy The Kid*. ★

but *The Hurt Locker* represents Bigelow's most fully realised vision of the Wild West circa Eight Now. The bombed-out alleyways and debris-strewn streets of Baghdad emphasise a caged volatility that lives within the characters themselves. Bigelow creates tension by shifting perspectives between combatants seen and unseen, establishing a lethal realisation that death can come from any angle.

It's only when the soldiers venture out to the expansive dunes of the desert that Bigelow's longshots pay homage to the classic landscapes and vistas of the traditional Western. During its most intense sequences, *The Hurt Locker* conducts a long-range shootout between sniping rifles thousands of feet away. It's riveting expressly because it matches the combat scenario with the Western standoff in a dynamic new way.

The psychologically stricken cowboy at the centre of *The Hurt Locker* is Sgt 1st Class William James (Jeremy Renner), an adrenaline junkie who lives for the rush of near-death while dismantling IEDs. Bigelow often films James in wide angle walking down deserted streets, swaggering inside his bomb suit like some alien gunslinger walking toward an unseen OK Corral.

Unlike most Western heroes haunted either by the disappearance or death of a family member, James chooses his role as a soldier over his role as a father and husband. To complicate things even more, James is a true isolationist, disavowing the classic war-film companionship with his fellow grunts and embracing his role as a savvy, dangerous loner of one.



Of all the modern filmmakers influenced by the Western genre, Michael Mann is the most interested in shattering classic representations of heroism and violence. Aside from his pristine adaptation of *The Last Of The Mohicans* – a film so wonderfully in touch with time and place that it feels

like a living poem – Mann's films are urban Westerns with dirt and blood on their American sleeves. *Heat* is a brazenly formal LA crime epic about a gang of bank robbers and the police squad tasked to bring them down – doing so on a correct cop and thief on a near elemental level.

'Guns like heroes' and 'hellfire' are irrelevant dogs for the driven professionals on both sides of the law completely dedicated to their moment-to-moment survival. Existing within a sea of reflective surfaces and concrete horizons, *Heat* is perfect for the orchestration of one of cinema's greatest standouts. Downtown LA becomes Tombstone, Arizona, in a matter of seconds – and Mann gives the automatic weapon fire a near-defining quality that echoes back through a century of Westerns.

Of course, *Django Unchained* isn't the first time Jamie Foxx has played a cowboy. Mann's *Vice* feels like a brilliantly realised digital descendant of *Heat*, further blurring the line between good and evil in a post-modern riff on the posse/marshall scenario. Instead of horses, undercover cops Crockett (Colin Farrell) and Tubbie (Foxx) ride on go-fast boats, airplanes and cars to hunt down drug lords and killers who evade the law like ghosts.

As a group, these men speak another language, one designed to remain foreign to those outside the crime game. What's most impressive about Mann's *Vice* is that it retains the essence of unspoken Western loyalty between cowboys even while it drips with fuzzy, neon-soaked modernity.

During filmmakers like Nolan, Bigelow and Mann are just a few of the auteurs who have examined what it means to be heroic, sacrificial and stoic in this – in any – conflicted age. Deceptively hiding in plain sight – inside the clothing of other movies – the cowboy exists in so many guises that nearly every genre, dead or alive, owes the Western some reward.

Don't look for the Stetson and the saddle. Look for the cowboy. He's there. He always will be. ®

THE LIFE OF NAT LOVE

IN AN OLD LOG CABIN, ON MY MASTER'S
PLANTATION IN SWANSON COUNTY IN TEN-
NESSEE IN 1854, I FIRST SAW THE
LIGHT OF DAY.

WAAAAAH



IT WAS 1854. THE WEST WAS STILL
WILD. AND A SLAVE WAS BORN WHO BECAME
A COWBOY. THIS IS HIS INCREDIBLE TRUE STORY.

MY FATHER WAS A SLAVE FUGITIVE
AND MY MOTHER WAS A COOK AT THE
MASTER'S HOUSE.

I ACQUIRED THE TASTE FOR STRONG
DRINK AND I COULD OUT-DRINK ANY MAN I
BOULDED MY.



I HAD SEEN MEN BEATEN TO THE GROUND
WITH THE BUTTS OF THE LONG-KNIPS CAUGHT
BY THOSE DEADLY OVERSHOTS.

AND YOUNG AS I WAS MY BLOOD OFTEN BOILED AS
I WITNESSED THESE CRUEL SCENES.



THEN SLAVERY WAS ABOLISHED
AND I WAS FREE.



I STARTED TO DRINK HORSES IT
WAS A QUESTION OF SURVIVING
THE HORSE OR BECOMING MY
HORSE.



I LEFT HOME AT 15 AND RODE TO DOUGLASS
CITY TO BECOME A COWBOY. THEY GAVE
ME A SHODDLE, SPURS AND A COLT US.





ON MY FIRST TRIP WITH THE CONCHO POLICE,
NOT FAR FROM DOGUE CITY ON OUR WAY HOME,
WE ENCOUNTERED A BAND OF INDIANS.

THERE WERE ABOUT A HUNDRED PAINTED
HEADS ALL WELL MOUNTED WHEN WE SAW
THE INDIANS THEY WERE COMING AFTER US
YELLING LIKE DEVILS.

WHEN I SAW THEM LOPING AFTER US AND HEARD
THEIR BLOOD CURDLING YELL, I LOST ALL COURAGE
AND THOUGHT MY TIME HAD COME TO BE.

NOW I HAD NEVER SHOT OFF A GUN IN MY
LIFE, BUT I UNLAPPED MY ARTILLERY AND
AFTER THE FIRST SHOT I LOST ALL FEAR.



AND FOUGHT LIKE A VERTIGAN.

THEN I LEARNED HOW TO
ADORN HORN STICKS. I HAVE
SEEN TWO HORSES AND THEIR
DRIVERS GOED TO DEVIL IN
THIS SPOT, SO IT'S NOT TO
BE TAKEN LIGHTLY.

THE LAST TIME I HAD A HORSE FULL WITH ME IN
KEEPING A 2-Y-L STEER, HE FELL AS THE STEER WAS
LOPING AT US, MY LEG LINGERED UNDER THE SADDLE,
GAVE THE STEER A BULLET IN THE HEAD.



AND HE STUMBLED AND FELL
DEAD ON TOP OF MY HORSE
AND ME.





WHILE BY SOME HOPE ON THIS TRAIL, WE HAD
A SHARP FIGHT WITH THE INDIANS, WHEN I SAW
THEM COMING, I SHOUTED TO MY COMPANIONS.

WE WILL ENTIRELY
KILL THEM TO DEATH

WE MET THEM WITH A HOT FIRE FROM OUR
GUNS, BUT THEY WERE IN LARGE NUMBERS,
AND MY PARTNER CARP'S HOLLEY WAS
KILLED, NOT THROUGH THE HEART.

WE HUND AFTERWARDS THAT
HE HAD BEEN SCALPED AND HIS
BODY FILLED WITH ARROWS.

ANOTHER TIME, I WAS RIDING ALONE WHEN
ALL AT ONCE I HEARD THE WELL-KNOWN
INDIAN WAR WHISTLE AND NOTICED NOT
FAR AWAY A LARGE PARTY OF INDIANS,
"FACING STRAIGHT" FOR ME. THEY WERE
ALL POINTED AND IN FULL WAVE FRONT.

AS THEIR BULLETS WERE SWINGING
AROUND ME, ONE OF THEM LAUGHED ME
IN THE LEG, PASSING CLEAN THROUGH
IT AND THEN THROUGH MY HORSE,
KILLING HIM.

LUCKILY FALLING BEHIND HIM I USED
MY SHIRT BODY FOR COVER, AND
STOOD THE WOUNDS OFF FOR A LONG
TIME, AS MY HORSE BEGAN TO

BUT FINALLY MY POSITION
CAME OUT, AND THE INDIANS
WERE ABLE TO FIND THIS OUT.

WHEN I CAME TO MY
SENSES I WAS CAPTIVE IN
THE INDIAN CAMP.



THREE DAYS AFTER MY CAPTURE MY HANDS WERE TIED AND I WAS DROPPED INTO THE FIRE. THEY BURNED ME OUTSIDE PARADISE AND I SOON LEARNED THEIR WAYS.



THEY SOON WERE TO UNDERSTAND THAT I HAD TO PAY THE LIEGE'S SISTER, PROMISING HE WOULD TOLERATE MY GOING, BUT I DID NOT WANT TO GET HARRASSED UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES.



I NOTED WHERE THE HORSES LEFT THEIR HORSES AT NIGHT, EVEN TAKING OUT THE HANDSOME AND FLEET HORSE FOR WHICH I HAD TO USE.



ALL THAT NIGHT I RODE AS FAST AS MY HORSE COULD LEAVE BE AND THE NEXT MORNING, THROUGH AROUND AFTER I LEFT THE HORSE CAMP I WAS SAFE ON THE HORSE RANCH AGAIN.



TO SEE ME NOW YOU WOULD NOT BELIEVE THE HORSE BRED-BRED DAVID DEW, COY BOY, THE SLAVE BOY WHO A FEW YEARS AGO HADN'T HAD IT, OR THE TENDERFOOT WHO SMOKE SMOKE AT THE SEAT OF A BIRD OF TUNTED INDIANS.

SOME MEN I MEET IN THE CATTLE
COUNTRY ARE NOW KNOWN TO THE
WORLD AS THE BADDEST OF BAD MEN
BUFFALO BILL, A MAN WHO HAS OFFERED
BURNED THE GUN BEATER TO A
STANDSTILL.

THE JAMES BROTHERS, BOSS AND
FRANK, I MET THEM OFTEN IN THE OLD
SHOPS ON THE RANGE WHEN THEY
TOOK FROM THE HERD THEY WENT TO
THE ROCK.

THE FIRST TIME I MET BLUE THE BOY
WAS IN A HORSEBACK, NEW PEOPLE, IN A
SALOON, WHEN HE ASKED ME TO DRINK
WITH HIM.



THE LAST TIME I SAW HIM
HE WAS LYING DEAD,
HAVING BEEN KILLED BY
PAT A GARDEN.

IT SEEMED TO ME THAT I BOKE A CHANGED LIFE
HOMES WERE NOT HIGH UNDER ME, THEY WERE
KILLED AROUND ME, BUT ALWAYS I ESCAPED
WITH A TROUBLE WOUND AT THE WORST.



THE COUNTRY IS ALMOST A KING OF
THE FIRST BUT, I MET LOVE, WILL HAVE
CHERISH A FOND AND LONG FEELING
FOR THE OLD DAYS IN THE RANGE.



IT'S EXCITING ADVENTURES, GOOD
AND BAD MEN, LONG VENTURESOME
JOURN, MANY FIGHTS AND THE
DREAMS I HAVE MADE.

EVERY TIME YOU
SHOOT AT SOMEONE,
PLAN ON DYING.



Nero Worship

WORDS BY FRANCO NERO
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ADRIAN JOHNSON



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DISCOVER YOU'RE QUENTIN TARANTINO'S
IDOL? SPAGHETTI WESTERN LEGEND FRANCO NERO - THE ACTOR WHO
INSPIRED DJANGO UNCHAINED - RECALLS QT'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH
HIM AND HOW THE TWO MEN FINALLY CAME FACE TO FACE...

About 14 years ago, Penelope Cruz told me she'd met a young American director. When she'd mentioned to him that I was working with her, he went crazy. He said, "Bring him here!" That was the first time I heard about Quentin Tarantino.

Over the years, I read interviews with Tarantino and he'd talk about how I was this mythical person. And when Harvey Weinstein came to Rome to present *Kill Bill*, I was invited along. Weinstein came to the stage and said, "I'm sorry, Tarantino couldn't make it, but he said if Franco Nero is in the audience to give him my best." I was so surprised.

When Tarantino came to Rome to present *Inglorious Basterds*, he told the press that he was not going to leave without meeting Franco Nero. That day, I was at a clinic having some tests done and I received a call saying that Mr. Tarantino would like to meet. I said I'd try my best. Finally we met at a restaurant in Rome called Il Bolognese. He came with Eli Roth. We embraced. He told me the story of how, at the age of 14, he started to work in a video shop and he got to know my movies. He knew practically all my films, even those that were never released in the US. Which is most of them! He then started to quote the lines from my movies. He even started to hear the theme tunes.

I told him that I was going to do another Western with Enzo Castellari and that he should come down for a cameo. I said that we'd like him, Robert Rodriguez and Eli Roth to play three cowboys. I said that I would kill him. He wanted to know how, so I said I would kill him with a shotgun, but instead of bullets, it would be loaded with gold coins. He loved that.

About two months later, I went to the Berlin Film Festival, where my wife Vanessa Redgrave was starring in Ralph Fiennes' *Coriolanus*, and Weinstein came over to me. He said, "Hey Franco, how are you? By the way, you're going to be in the next Tarantino movie." I didn't know

a thing. I had to go to LA and saw all these articles saying that Tarantino was going to do a Django film and it was going to be part of the series started by Sergio Corbucci and Franco Nero. The press started to ask me questions - and I didn't know anything. Three months later, I still had no idea.

Finally, one day in October 2011, there was a call from Tarantino. He told me that he loves the name Django, he loves Corbucci and that I had to be in it because I was Django! He loved Django because, at its core, it's a political movie. I had an idea for a cameo in mind, so I told him. He said he'd think about it. Two or three months went by and I heard nothing. Then in January, when he was already shooting the film, he called me again.



We met at the Beverly Hills Hotel and we had this long, long breakfast. He told me he wanted me to be in it, but that my idea wouldn't work. I wanted to be Django's father, but I was white, and his Django was black. At the end, we shook hands and I accepted his idea. I suggested that I wouldn't get a billing, but he wanted my name on there. So *Django Unchained* contains "a friendly appearance from Franco Nero".

That was it. I got a good scene with Leonardo DiCaprio and another one with Jamie Foxx. He showed the original Django to all the crew and he kept telling everyone that I was the biggest star in the world along with Clint Eastwood, Charles Bronson and Alain Delon. He made me laugh. I had a lot of fun. He's an incredible director. Full of energy and enthusiasm.

He's like a child, you know? I told Tarantino that in Italy we have a poet called Giovanni Pascoli who said, "In each man there is a soul of a child. A man is only man while that soul stays with him. When it's gone, he's full of shit." ★

The Wild, Wild Career Of

"TARANTINO, LUIS BUÑUEL AND RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER ARE ALL SIMILAR IN A WAY," CLAIMS NERO. HE'D KNOW. HE'S THE ONLY ACTOR IN HISTORY TO HAVE WORKED WITH THEM ALL...

NERO ON... LUIS BUÑUEL

"Belial was, for me, the best director in the world. He had this amazing black humour. He would never call me Franco, always Nero, because he was against General Franco at the time. One day we were shooting a scene for *Tristano*. We were in this square and everyone was preparing the scene. He seemed nervous. He was pacing. I asked him what was wrong. He said he couldn't find his briefcase with the script in it. He was very flustered. Everyone stopped what they were doing and searched for it. Eventually it turned up. He took it and he clasped it to his breast like a treasure. Everybody went back to work. He waited until no one was looking and he wandered off. He found this little bench away from the crew and sat there all alone. I followed him without him knowing. Finally, he opened the briefcase and there was a ham sandwich and a little Coca-Cola bottle which had been filled with wine. He started to eat. I said, 'Luis, what are you doing?' He said, 'Nero, Nero! Please don't tell anyone! I need to eat, but if everyone sees me they'll want to eat too and I have to work!'"

NERO ON... RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER

"I got the script for *Quervelle* and was told that Fassbinder wanted me to be in it. He was very shy. We started the movie and I asked Rainer how he wanted me to play the character. He said, 'You just do it. If there is something wrong, I'll let you know.' And he never told me anything. One day, we went to his house and I saw that he had 40 or 50 of my films on VHS. He knew all my work. We went for some food at a place called Paris Bar and he said that we have to do three more movies together. He asked the waiter to bring a napkin and a pencil. He began to write. '1. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, will do three movies with Franco Nero. They will be 1. *Rosa Luxemburg*, 2. *Le Bleu Des Ciel* by Georges Bataille and 3. *Cocaine*.' He kept asking me to sign. So I did, but of course you know what happened..."

Interview by David Jenkins

Franco Nero

NERO ON... *CARS 2*

"They asked me to put the voice on a car called Uncle Topolino. When I did the voice, I literally just spoke as I'm speaking to you now. I asked if they wanted me to exaggerate it at all and do more of an Italian accent. So instead of saying, 'Ferrari', I'd say, 'Ferrari-aaaaa!' They loved it. John Lasseter is another of these child-like people. I don't mean childish, I mean this in a very positive way. It was a short experience, but I liked it very much."

NERO ON... TINTO BRASS

"I've done many movies with my wife Vanessa Redgrave. Sometimes it wasn't easy to work with her, you know? But we had two great experiences in the '70s with Tinto Brass. They were called *Drop Out* and *The Vacation*. They were wonderful experiences. Because there was essentially no script. We invented most of the dialogue. We had fun, because it was a tiny little crew. In the '60s, Tinto Brass was known as a genius in Italy. He was being touted as the new Fellini - he made fantastic movies. Brass was a very talented man, but his movies were not making money and he got fed up. So he started to make erotica. The first one was *Caligula*. In fact, he asked me if I'd do a movie with him last year. It was called *Wetpao*. I told him it was too much. The times have changed. I told him you don't need to show all that on the screen..."

NERO ON... *DIE HARD 2*

"I didn't enjoy doing the *Die Hard* sequel. I had the business manager in Los Angeles called Fred and Joel Silver was one of his clients. Fred kept telling me that he wanted to deck out his office with old movie posters, so I gave him all my posters from my movies. Joel Silver started looking at the posters and my name was all over them. He asked Fred who I was and Joel said, 'I want him! I gotta have him!' It turned out Betsy Harlin was a big fan and had watched my movies as a kid. I told him that I didn't like the part. He said, 'Whaddya you mean, you don't like it?' I guess over and over in the big movie! I eventually agreed, but the experience was not very good. We travelled all over the States looking for snow. That was the only year there wasn't any." ☹



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This Is 40

Directed by Judd Apatow
Starring PAUL RUDD, LESLIE MANN, MAUDE APATOW
Releases 14 FEBRUARY

REVIEWS

Judd Apatow's *This Is 40*, which has been billed as a kind of paen to the midlife, to 2000's *Knocked Up*, is a strange, strange movie. For all intent and purpose, it doesn't offer a conventional narrative, its setting is not particularly vivid, there are no real jokes, there's no clear target audience, the supporting cast drifts unobtrusively in the background and the customary asides of comic pop-cultural references are all episodes of absolutely nothing. And yet there's something about the film which is brazenly subversive and alive to the daily complexities of the lower-middle classes, like we've been invited to join Apatow on a late-night quest for comedy rock.

To place this on a map of cinema past and present, it would likely land closer to Bergman's *Smiles From A Marriage* than, say, any of Adam Sandler's reputation-generating. Or better still, one of Albert Brooks' directorial efforts, such as the brilliant *Modern Romance*. (This would figure as Brooks stars here in a typically hilarious supporting role.) Perhaps the incoherent, ambitious *This Is 40* isn't rejecting convention, more than it's anxiously redressing the usefulness of those conventions. Additionally, there is no coup de cinema here. And within the context of the film, that lack of hokey symbolism, that lack of existential eldritch and cross spiritual fulfillment is exactly what the film and Apatow are primarily, passionately concerned with. Like life, *This Is 40* is shapeless and maddly inscrutable. But in a good way.

It sees Paul Rudd and Leslie Mann play Pete and Debbie, a married twosome both seriously touching 40 and with a pair of shrewd, adorable daughters. One, Raddie (Maude Apatow), is navigating the bottomless corridors of Sweden while trying to make it through the final series of *Lost*. The other, Charlotte (Jen Apatow), is younger and she puts a brave face on her disappointment at losing her older

sister to a friend. Pete's got still his chips stacked on a second label currently geared towards putting dissonant rock (specifically Graham Parker) back on the map. Leslie, meanwhile, manages a clucking stone from which one of her staff is pinching money. Could it be mongrel sitcom basketballer Josh (Charlyne Yi) or the shifty-and-proud gold-digger Desi (Megan Fox, very much playing to type)?

And that's pretty much it. There's not so much refined emotional journey or collective god the characters hurdle towards, more that Apatow offers a laconic glimmer at a group of people simply trying to live their lives, or – as the title evokes – what remains of their lives. It's a joyful and honest piece of work that's suffused with a hitherto sense of leaping and regret. It's a more subtly philosophical film than we might have expected, one that channels our darkest fears and poses big questions like why we have children, why we beg boues, why we get married, why we have sex and why we have jobs. With *This Is 40*, you really get that lifting sense of what it feels like for time to pass you by.

It's present, too, addressing the difficulties of retaining some semblance of happiness as our personal dreams are tethered to erratic financial forecasts. As Pete firmly believes that Graham Parker is a success story waiting to happen, so Apatow plants the idea that success is transitory and that it's really tough to convince the braying boards that the elderly are worthy of unquestioned celebration. Indeed, if *This Is 40* failed at the box office, it would almost be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Yet there is a sparkling look, and it's known throughout the industry as *The Road Problem*. Supremely great and droll, comic actor Paul Rudd has through sheer scrupulous bloodmindedness, closed himself into a hallowed circle of performers who are able to make their living by simply playing the

same character over and over (cf. Bill Murray, Will Ferrell). Sure, there will usually be some preliminary contextual detail, that will alter from film to film – he's an uncouth drop-out who gets on with David's obsession! He's an uncouth drop-out who gets a clunky new best friend! He's an uncouth drop-out who's forced to live in a communal – but the schtick remains the same, and as long as you don't find him a pining jar-off, then you'll be in a warm place with his movies.

But like Jerry Seinfeld before him, Rudd does not have a sitcom (hurry) bone in his body. When Pete is chastised for dragging the family to the financial precipice, Rudd is physically unable to hide the ingrained smirk from his face, and it almost breaches the conceptual hull of Apatow's steadfastly serious comedy. But it doesn't, as Rudd's constant recourse to humour ends up working as a credible emotional shield – he's the boy who never grew up, Peter Pan with innermorbid. Yet unlike his on-screen avatar, Apatow has grown up, and in doing so has made a big, glossy Hollywood comedy whose engine runs on a heady mixture of north and melancholy. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. Funny People landed that comedy arrian Judd Apatow was off to a strange new direction

4

ENJOYMENT. Maddening and disorienting, but that's the way it's meant to be. Apatow offers a new, more disorienting type of Hollywood comedy.

4

IN RETROSPECT. A real step up for Apatow. His masterpiece? Quite possibly

4



King Of Comedy

FEATURE



Joan J. Linn

The name Judd Apatow has become a mirth-mark of quality for comedy on film and TV. But where did this comic titan come from? And who did he bring with him?

Judd Apatow is a man with tentacles. Metaphorical tentacles, but tentacles none the less. Over the past 20 years, they have stretched and curled and wriggled their way into every nook and cranny of the American comedy firmament. If you were to construct a spider diagram with Apatow's face at the centre, its spindly extremities would probably extend out to infinity and beyond. One might even see him as the *Spidee* Cousin of modern comedy, the new film, *This Is 40*, cavalcades and distils much of what has made broad Apatow such an integral presence on the landscape of cinema and television. He may have been attached to the odd dud or misfire, but for the large part, his name is a synonym of quality. But the question remains: who is Judd Apatow and where did he come from?

Stand up Guy

As an ice-breaker for his stand-up shows in the early '90s, Apatow pruned the pain of his hand up to his left eye forming a pocket of air. He then pressed down hard to produce a fart noise. The comic ripples of this disposable and oddly goofy gesture can be traced through Apatow's comedic career, presenting both his love for finding bleepy spoken word monologues with explosive physical performance which accentuates the quills of the human body. As a youth, he would go and watch stand-up with his mother, who worked as an author at a comedy club. In the late '80s, he befriended Ben Stiller and ended up skating as apartmenter with Adam Carolla, two modern comedy behemoths who Apatow would end up writing for, the former in *The Ben Stiller Show* and the latter in 2009's hilarious deconstruction of the comedy circuit, *Funny People*.

TV Times

The Larry Sanders Show, starring Gary Shandling as a deeply neurotic and cynical chat-show host, still stands up as one of the finest (and, yes, funniest) TV sitcoms ever produced – and Judd Apatow had his paw prints all over it. But its significance runs deeper than the mere

quality of its gags or its life start's wicked way with an acid one-liner. Here was an instance of autobiography playing a major part in the construction of Apatow's comedy, transporting that heavy old dictum of writing: what you know to new and exciting intellectual places. Part of what makes Apatow's directorial work so fascinating is that – much like Woody Allen – it builds on and around biography while keeping a playful distance from what is fact and what is fiction. *This Is 40* is probably the defining expression of that impulse. But perhaps the first project for which the Apatow name stood front-and-centre was the beloved cult comedy *Breaks 40 Girls*, which pointed a spotlight at such figure Apatowian stalwarts as Jason Segel, Seth Rogen and James Franco.

I Lost It At The Movies

Beyond a classic *romcom* episode of *The Simpsons*, British audiences may not be particularly au fait with the brilliant animated sitcom. The *Critic*, for which Apatow was a writer and producer. Channeling the daily spats of a reality, *David Letterman* TV film critic named Jay Sherman (famously voiced by John Lovitz), the programme presented Apatow as a man of genuine cinematic substance. After finding his creative footing with some low-thrill-dollar film production gigs (Sydney-based hotel/hall hotbed kidnap caper *Gothic* and Disney-backed hit camp farce *Heavyweights*), Apatow took on production duties for his old pal Ben Stiller and his eccentric (and highly under-rated) directorial gig *The Cable Guy*.

Direct Action

Apatow remained a back-room guy until 2005 when he finally launched himself as a director. The result was *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, a film which neatly laid out the Apatow cinematic blueprint by employing the hang-dog, unsexually comely off-kilter male prone to explosive and important realisations. Even some of his weaker mainstream projects (famously involving Will Ferrell) arrived with a sharp satirical undernote.

beyond its absurd characters and protracted flute solos. 2004's *Anchorman* played on the pomposity of TV news, while *Talented Mr. Ripston* nudged its farcical character comedy in a shell of cynical corporate manipulation that has become a mainstay of Internet sport. This commitment to making films whose content orbits around real, messy human issues and actually has something to say goes some way to explain why an Apatow movie will always stretch to the two-hour mark and often break through it. It wasn't until 2007's *Knocked Up* (a *Sex* sequel) that the Apatow name went nuclear. Mapping the floor at the box office, it was the big turning point in Apatow's career, providing a professional springboard for such actors as Paul Field, Jonah Hill, Jay Baruchel and Katherine Heigl.

Girls, Girls, Girls

Apatow came under fire for the occasionally unsex, male-centric focus of his films, notably his probing of the suboptimal myth that, per *Knocked Up*, all it would take as the unwanted seed of a phony, ugly marital to make a successful professional woman want to fuck it all in and embrace her maternal instincts. He went some way to atone for those sins by leading his redoubtable name in to the leaded HBO sitcom *Girls*, the brainchild of Lena Dunham, which operated as an extension of her highly impressive and acerbic indie film feature, *Fruitvale, New York*. Also, lest we forget the equality rights bomb that was *Brildomade*, a film which proved that women can certainly still themselves in a crowded street too.

The Future

In the same way he ran the potential in *Tiny Tim*, Apatow has produced *Can A Song Change Your Life?*, a new feature by Irish director John Carney, the writer/director behind 2006's sultry musical sleeper hit *Once*. Season two of *Girls* drops in the US in January, though the majority of your Apatow fix will have to come from his brilliant new film *This Is 40* (see review on page 48) ☺

Do You Hear The People Sing?



FEATURE

There are already whispers that this year might see a director winning a Best Picture Oscar for consecutive films and it's either going to be Kathryn Bigelow for *Broke Back Mountain* (see review on page 56) or The King's Speech director Tom Hooper for his all-singing, all-dancing adaptation of Theatreland sensation *Les Misérables*. Hooper's film is being billed as the first time the musical has been transposed to the big screen, but Victor Hugo's beloved tome has made its way to the screen no less than 13 times. *LWT* takes a look at its cinematic legacy through its most eye-catching adaptations.

1. Les Misérables (1909)

Directed by **STUART BLACKTON**

Back when cinema was still taking its baby steps, this four-reel silent film was the very first screen version of Hugo's literary epic. Starring as the story's lighted-on-correct hero Jean Valjean was Maurice Costello, an Irish-American vaudeville comic and, incidentally, the guest goodwill ambassador of Drew Barrymore. Historical bonus points for the fact that the film was produced by French newspaper pioneer Charles Pathé.

2. Les Misérables (1934)

Directed by **RAYMOND BERNARD**

Despite there being numerous 'glush' versions of this story during the '20s and '30s, it wasn't until 1934 that the world was given its first great-screen treatment of Hugo's ragged epic. Little-known French director Raymond Bernard was given a bit of a critical reappraisal lately as

this film was rescued from oblivion by the US DVD label Criterion, giving modern viewers the chance to see why this near-five-hour saga is often hailed as a breathtaking masterpiece. Look out for Charles Vanel in the role of Inspector Javert – the actor would go on to star with Yves Montand in *The Wages of Fear* and with Cary Grant in *To Catch A Thief*.

3. Les Misérables (1935)

Directed by **RICHARD BOLESŁAWSKI**

This was the first major American take on the novel, with its two central roles given to raffish and Frodric March and splendidly the greatest British actor of all time, Charles Laughton. Though it may be seen as 1935's equivalent of *Oscar Soldier* (it didn't actually win anything), it was criticised for straying way too far from the original text. It's now mainly of interest for being photographed by the great Gregg Toland, who went on to shoot Wyler's sublime *Wuthering Heights* and *Ocean Waves*' best-of-bat-buffering *Citizen Kane*. An extra suggestion for trivia fans? It was the final film by 20th Century Pictures before it merged with Fox.

4. Les Misérables (1952)

Directed by **LEWIS MILESTONE**

If there was one director who knew his way around a luminous, gaze-blasting genre film, it was Lewis Milestone, the man behind such Golden Age war epics as *All Quiet On The Western Front* and *A Walk In The Sun*. Starring

as Valjean is Michael Rennie, who just one year previously had secured his place in the annals of cinema lore by playing Kato in Robert Wise's *The Day The Earth Stood Still*.

5. Les Misérables (1995)

Directed by **CLAUDE LELUCH**

Taking Hugo's source material off-piste, French New Wave hanger-on Claude Lelouch wrote and directed this maddening mid-'90s effort in which a humble French paper played by Jean-Paul Belmondo relates the adventures of Jean Valjean to his own life. Much of the original text is channelled through the dual narratives, but it all plays a little like the cinematic equivalent of *Dark Notes*.

6. Les Misérables (1998)

Directed by **BILLE AUGUST**

One of three men to have won the Palme d'Or on two separate occasions, Danish director Bille August clearly thought he'd paid his artistic dues and so went proving for the mainstream dollar for a roaring Hollywood costume drama with all the bells and whistles, this isn't bad. There's also fun to be had seeing Liam Neeson as wrongly-imprisoned scamp-turned-weeping-angel Valjean, especially in the light of the current and ever-extending *Death Wish* phase of his acting CV. ☺

Les Misérables is not in cinema on 11 January. Read our review at liffwatchers.co.uk

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Cloud Atlas

Directed by LANA WACHOWSKI, ANDY WACHOWSKI, TOM TYKWER

Starring TOM HANKS, HALEY BENNETT, JEN BRONFELT

Released 22 FEBRUARY

At the climax of *Marty Pecher's* *The Missing of Life*, Michael Palin – playing a bored designer in a chaste, bourgeois ballroom – is handed a golden envelope containing the answer to the ultimate question. For the previous 90 minutes, the Pythons have delivered a series of unconnected vignettes governing the seven ages of man as a tasteless cavalcade of frenzy, humiliation and desecration. Finally, Palin opens the letter. It reads, “Well, it’s nothing very special. Try and be nice to people, avoid eating fat, read a good book now and then, and try and live in peace and harmony with people of all creeds and nations.”

And that, as a nutshell, is *Cloud Atlas*, 172 long, long minutes of meandering around in a dressing-up box, all capped off with a desecrated emotional bar mitzvah that’s so long, weak and obvious it could have easily fallen out of a delusional Christmas cracker.

Drawing from David Mitchell’s fractured and purportedly “unfilmable” 2004 sci-fi dystopian, directors Andy and Lana Wachowski (with assets from *Run Lola Run* helmer Tom Tykwer) present six disparate shaggy-dog stories that take place at various points throughout history, all featuring combinations of their principal cast in different places and distracting prosthetics. So we have backstroked movie Tom Hanks up to clucking on a 19th-century schooner. Then there’s tattooed, cowardly future-man Tom Hanks looking around post-apocalyptic Hawaii and talking gibberish with Halle Berry. The

directors’ sole task is to convince us that these malformed little tales are interconnected by threads of eternal commonality.

The result is a baffling confection that plays out like a gross parody of an avant-garde prestige picture and one that repeatedly fails to lend its various strands into anything even approaching a coherent whole. Cutting back and forth between six obscure, amateur stories doesn’t make the overall proceedings any more pointed or interesting. Making your film long does not make it epic. Willfully recycling your acting ensemble in order to ram home your maddening declarations about the universality of the human condition is not ambitious, but tiring and indulgent. It creates a substance effect.

And isn’t having most of the well-to-do Westerners eventually rescued or redeemed by a coterie of “magical ethnic” – a beaifé Korean sex bot, a South African slave, an aye, beaiféed Mexican “witch,” some Scottish rugby hooligans – rather undermining the world-slugging premise? Never mind. As long as everyone’s in constant floods of tears and the soundtrack swirls in all the right places, perhaps no one will notice.

Visually, there are pros and cons. Some fairly bare outdoor scenes have clearly been shot in the studio, giving the film and occasionally mad, synthetic feel. Elsewhere, a high-styled sci-fi milieu transports us to a futuristic, Manga-inspired Neo Seoul where we are able to

revel in some breathtaking production design. Also, a thumping retro-bike chase suggests the Wachowskis took a few old-room lessons away from the failure of *Speed Racer*. Indeed, the editing on the whole is effective, with the rigorous cross-cutting during first half of the film at least giving the illusion that there’s an organic relationship between these discordant tales. Even if, frankly, there really isn’t.

An occasional reminder that we are all standstills, that we’re all in this together and, hell, that we’re all Tom Hanks is never wholly welcome, but the face-tempting, overblown, self-congratulatory, logically sketchy tag that signals *Cloud Atlas* draws that message of all its colour and shade. Life is sweet and *Cloud Atlas* – to quote God – is nothing very special. **ADAMLEE DAVID**

ANTICIPATION. *Releasing a six-minute trailer is suggestive of eleven-th-hour pain.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *The perfect film for all those people whose one, verdant wish in life is to swim with dolphins.*

2

IN RETROSPECT. *We wish we could call this a mad folly.*

1



Life Of Pi

Directed by ANG LEE

Starring SURAJ SHARMA, IRIFAN KHAN, ABUL MUSSAIN

Released 20 DECEMBER

With *Life Of Pi*, director Ang Lee, often derided in certain circles for not possessing a distinctive visual signature, crafts a pectorally rich, occasionally stunning exercise in CG imagismaking. And yet in concocting a slightly askew dreamworld of computer-generated tigers and islands overrun by sizzling mermaids, Lee hasn't exactly staked out a fresh mode of visual creation. Instead, he's made skilful use of available technologies (including a nicely controlled employment of 3D) to build a series of images that, although initially thrilling, come to feel like deeply self-conscious signs of overly prettified kitsch.

Based on Yann Martel's bestselling novel of the same name, Lee's film follows young Pi (Sharma) Patel (Sharma) as he leaves his native India with his family who decide to shut down their zoo, relocate to Canada and sell off the animals upon arrival. They encounter a storm which sinks the ship and kills everybody leaving him adrift on a lifeboat and in the company of a ferocious tiger named Richard Parker. What's striking about this film is not so much the director's facility with set pieces (the shipwreck sequence is a staggering triumph) or the skilful creation of the CG tiger (whose subtlest movements feel utterly realistic),

but Lee's willingness to let large stretches of the film play out in relative uneventful quiet, a decision no doubt dictated by the source material.

Life Of Pi excels in those moments that deal with its hero's stubborn process of learning to survive and tame his vicious inmate. As he consults a handy manual on the subject, Pi's attempts at these twin tasks are played with humour and imagination and, above all, an unshamed quality appropriate to a film set nearly entirely at sea and with only one speaking character. This tranquility can last only so long, though, as Lee must, after all, tell a story. And not just any story, but one that, per its film-opening mandate, is meant to do something like prove the existence of God.

Introduced by a framing device in which the now-grown Pi (Irfan Khan) relates his adventures to a reporter (Rafe Spall), the film announces its intention to be a specifically religious fable, in imperative that Lee and *Finding Neverland* screenwriter David Magee develop via a series of hedge-betting manoeuvres that seem to equate Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam and secular environmentalism with equally valid religions. The film does so specifically about the art of storytelling, advice that stands in...coincidentally?—as a metaphor for faith.

But mostly these religious meditations (which only very rarely factor into the narrative project, as when, in a desperate moment, Pi delivers a plaint to the heavens) are a weak structural device to add belt to what is essentially a simple story. This along with Lee's blandly browns flourishes, such as a 2008-style heading sequence. These become necessary because over the course of the film's two-hour runtime, the themes of the central story become quickly apparent. That's little emotional investment in the character, so after a while it's just him and a tiger floating on the breeze (well in some CG shorts and a quest for God, then apparently you've got yourself a film of grand significance. **ANDREW SCHENKER**

ANTICIPATION. *How a ill Yann Martel's supposedly unfilmable novel play on the big screen?*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Ang Lee keeps the story humming along and looking incredibly good.*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *There's less than meets the eye in Lee's affirmatively unsatisfying fable*

2



Zero Dark Thirty

Directed by **KATHRYN BIGELOW**
 Starring **JESSICA CHASTAIN, CHRIS PRATT, EDGAR RAMIREZ**
 Released 23 JANUARY



On 11 May 2011, America finally got its big-screen. When Kathryn Bigelow heard the news, she was ready to shoot Bin Laden herself, pinned for a film on Osama's escape from the battle of Tora Bora. *Zero Dark Thirty* is her rapid response. Like *The Hurt Locker*, her film is raw-hardened, sharp and unflinching, resistant to the heat of perbuck and with its eye on the journey, not the destination. *Question* is, released a year-and-a-half after Bin Laden's death, can audiences handle the truth? Move to the point, can Bigelow?

Spanning 10 years, three continents and two presidencies, the hunt for Bin Laden was a matter of frustration, as scribbled as the 9/11 messages that open the movie. Writer Mark Boal's tenacious research has, nonetheless, pulled something from the data-stream: the story of Maya, a female CIA analyst whose 13 years at the agency were laser-sighted solely on nailing Bin Laden. The film's assertion that the world's most wanted terrorist was caught by an agent with a hunch is as unlikely as it is compelling and serves as an invaluable dramatic 'W', if not an emotional one.

No suspense, back-story or even any downtime, Jessica Chastain's iron-willed Maya is another of Bigelow's career obsessions whose great satisfaction is awarded with bitter victory, first over Al-Qaeda, then her own mischievous associates - "The motherfucker that found him!" she yells

during an agency pow-wow, in a *Breakfast-club* offshoot destined for YouTube parody. Compiled from first-hand accounts and designed as docudrama, *Zero Dark Thirty* makes a big deal of its veracity, but it's essentially obedient to genre.

Driven by Maya's professional mania, the film assumes the shape of a steady serial-killer procedural, with its dead ends and red herrings, its evidence walls and fictional protagonists. Punctuated by dramatic reconstructions of real events (including 9/11), the film dredges up the mitchy dread of the *Terror* films. The influence of Fischer's *Zodiac*, another tale of mania obsession, looms large, as does Oliver Assayas' masterful muscledrama *Carrie* (the casting of Edgar Ramirez feels like an act of pure homage).

Perhaps Bigelow's shrewdest move is resisting the temptation to drop the shadows, cast out the light, kill the colour and make it 'dark'. Yet Greg Freer's photography is crystal-clear and clear-eyed - the style is a statement. These are the faces, it says - unliking, nothing to hide, the backroom manipulations of the Bush-era exposed and indicted in broad daylight. Waterboarding may have got results, but *Zero Dark Thirty*'s torture scenes smack of authentic shame.

It's only on the final act that Bigelow succumbs to her Hollywood impulses and that title lives up to its *PlayStation* shooter connotations. Blood, buff and bearded, SEAL Team Six have been

Chuck Norris-ed by warbirds and *Final Destination* by Bigelow. The moment their stealth choppers swoop through the Baben Hills, guided by the CIA in their NARA-style command base, the film switches gears and Bigelow starts talking action-slang - they could be off on an Alien bag hunt. Breath by breath, breath by breath, the real-time assault unfolds in short rapid-rises, its violence unrelent but staged, nonetheless, with prickling suspense.

The Big Moment happens in a flash. No lingering money shot. Osama, a phantom figure throughout, dies as he lived, in the shadows. Times Square won't be cheering, but the going-home glow has the smell of victory. If that's the way Hollywood does catharsis, so be it, but there's a far better movie before it. **80/100/100**

ANTICIPATION. This is Kathryn Bigelow. *Hurt Locker* below, so a hard-aid hunt for Bin Laden

4

ENJOYMENT. Compelling, clear-eyed, no clichés and no crowd-pleasing either

4

IN RETROSPECT. It's events and lingers long after the lights go up

5

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Lincoln

Directed by STEVEN SPIELBERG

Starring DANIEL DAY LEWIS, TOMMY LEE JONES, SALLA FIELD

Released 23 JANUARY

REVIEWS

Steven Spielberg's most vital film (often his most commercially successful) straggles theory elements into seemingly innocuous shells. *E.T.* and *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* untangle the instability of the nuclear family so handily it hurts. *Like a Cape*, redemption only comes when the pain is unbearable. His most effective recent films — *A.I.*, *Minority Report* and *War Of The Worlds* — cut deeply when it's time to depict strong negative emotions (guilt, fear, abandonment, irreparable destruction), then collapse on the face of a happy ending. *A.I.'s* dourly straightforward "happy ending," a nihilistic gut-punch, marks the one instance that a Spielberg finale, complete with soaring John Williams score, can't be taken at face value. In short, Spielberg is a staggeringly gifted technician who filters when it's time to be earnest.

More than a decade in development, Spielberg's *Lincoln* is complex and sensitive on the subject of political ends versus means, in specific relation to the passage of the 13th Amendment outlawing slavery in the United States. His star is Daniel Day-Lewis, whose Abraham Lincoln is one of the arch method man's most unimpeachable archetypes. He tells numbing historical anecdotes to slow the pulse of action to a tempo he can control.

In *Lincoln*, he's unflinching in depicting the moral compromises that make change possible. The moral shortcuts necessitated by the executive and legislative branches of the US Government are — via Billie Kasner's screenplay — presented unblinkingly.

Of several monologues, the most spellbinding is the one in which Lincoln articulates the legal grey areas he exploited to preserve the Union, applying a lawyer's mind to a moral task that can't be legally accomplished. That Lincoln is willing to organize the dubious vote-by-vote persuasion of opposing Democrats necessary to ratify the 13th Amendment, promising them post-legislative jobs if necessary

As severe abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens, Tommy Lee Jones is the scepter of pragmatism. Just as Day-Lewis predictably and flawlessly disappears into his part, Jones assimilates his his propensity of barking outrage and baleful glares has rarely been better served. In a key moment, Stevens is persuaded to quell his righteous serenity to the expedient end of passing the 13th Amendment by deying that he seeks full equality for black Americans, only legal equality.

It's a riveting capitulation, rendered tender when Stevens strides off the floor of the House of Representatives with John Williams' score — more rarely heard than usual but still always unelusive — cheering him with a warm dose of wooden sentiment, transforming a moment of necessary ethical compromise into unambiguous applause.

Each side's sentimentality is often, thankfully, avoided in one of Spielberg's most stylistically tamped-down films. Actor's self-assurance prominently comes in the heavy shades of grey: gold, bleak grey and stark white that make up the palette. Absent fathers, a permanent motif in Spielberg's work, have dwindled a bit in recent years, though it's probably worth noting that Lincoln's assassination is depicted through his young son's acrid eyes — the loss of the father of the nation as depicted foremost via his lineage.

Infections include — predictably given *Amistad* — a gut-wrenching take on race, with Lincoln's guttural monosyllabic wailing with a president hung in his throat as the president leaves for his fatal date at Ford's Theatre. Salla Field's turn as Mary Todd Lincoln is highly respectable; viewers with no idea of her documented history of depressive behaviour (eventually reductively interpreted as bipolar disorder) willingly take her shrieking as fulfilling the usual obligation of cinematic wives towards husbands as bigger-than-themselves messiahs.

Viewers patience may wane entirely when the prelude Abraham's decision to let son Robert (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) enlist in the Union Army, risking his entrance into combat before the

Amendment's passage can ensure the fighting's end. "Since you are sending our son to war, was to you if you fail to pass the Amendment," she hisses. If Spielberg's goal is to show the pressure — reasonable and unreasonable — that Lincoln balanced, his execution falters.

It's eminently watchable, but Lincoln's larger purpose and relevance for New Orleans classes. Released against the backdrop of a contentious election in which the former party of Lincoln (the Republicans) relied heavily on racist dog-whistle cues to rally the faithful, dialogue about white people having lost their moral compass suggests one reason. Another odd cue comes towards the end, when Lincoln muses about his post-political-life wish to visit Jerusalem, a historically documented urge that's nonetheless an odd choice to foreground.

Kasner and Spielberg's side previous collaboration was on *Monk*, which expressed both of their publicly noted ambivalence about liberal's policies measures regarding the Palestinians. Even more suggestively, Lincoln deals with the president's second inaugural address — specifically, its last line, calling for "charity, peace, among ourselves, and all nations." Labeling this a plea for a two-state solution is a delicate stretch, but a call for international pragmatic negotiation might be that Lincoln's strongest reason to resist. **AUBURN DIXON**

ANTICIPATION. Spielberg, Day-Lewis, Kasner: America's greatest president. The stars are very much aligned

5

ENJOYMENT. A soaring, rigorous and morally complex legal procedural more than a true biopic. And all the better for it

4

IN RETROSPECT. The struggles keep accumulating after the curtains are drawn

3



Antiviral

Directed by **BRANDON CRONENBERG**
 Starring **CALEB LANDRY JONES,**
SARAH GUDON, MALCOLM MCDOWELL
Released 6 FEBRUARY



The rotten apple hasn't fallen very far from the tree on the evidence of Brandon 'son of David' Cronenberg's caustic, so-far-gone-whole has taken a turn for the revoltingly icky.

Guest, ghostly, goate-bearded Syd March (Caleb Landry Jones) is a lime-greening corporate stooge who works for the Locus Clinic, a slick corporate entity that harvests misdeeds of the rich and famous and then - for obscene sums of money - transmits them to fans as the ultimate corporate tribute.

But it seems that Syd has acquired a taste for getting high on his own supply. He must keep his excesses unnoticed from both the execs at his firm and those of a rival pharma company who are scheming to get their hands on any new and exciting diseases.

Perhaps more scolding on paper than it is to actually watch, *Antiviral* is a slick, dark and highly original satire which occasionally drifts into the dark world of surgical horror. You could easily file next to Darren Aronofsky's similarly inclined (though admittedly superior) *Pi*, or even some of *Yves* Cronenberg's early, hairy ones, such as *Shivers* and *Rebel*. And highly cynical though

it all may sound, the film's grey central motif is clearly not meant to be taken literally, offering a fairly conventional visualization of the nation that modern celebrity culture is out of control and spreads through our souls like a nasty virus. The elegantly weird Jones makes for an interestingly unsure lead, though his species-species-like steeliness doesn't really mesh him with the requisite vulnerability to make you really hope that he can get saved. **DUB JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION: Who wouldn't embrace the chance to *publicly* embrace another branch of the Cronenberg family tree?

4

ENJOYMENT: Great idea well executed. But really runs out of steam on the home straight.

3

IN RETROSPECT: If David Cronenberg's entire body of work didn't exist, *Antiviral* would be a revelation. As it stands...

2

Jiro Dreams Of Sushi

Directed by **DAVID GELF**
 Starring **JIRO ONO**
Released 11 JANUARY



"You must dedicate your life to mastering your skill. That's the secret of success and the key to being regarded 'honorably'." As spoken by renowned sushi chef Jiro Ono, this dedication explains both the spirit of the shokusan - the true craftsman - and the pervading theme of David Gelf's superlative documentary.

Set to the gentle strains of Tchaikovsky, Bach and Philip Glass, Gelf takes as his subject the life and work of the 85-year-old chef and his two sons, all of whom are based in Tokyo. His film explores the sheer level of perfectionism and creativity required to attain (and retain) three Michelin stars, the highest honour in the restaurant business.

Yet it's so much more than just foodie porn with a tasteful classical soundtrack - it's an elegant study of Japanese culture and the shokusan spirit which encompasses an ongoing quest for purity and refinement. The film also explores the complexity of lineage, as the two middle-aged siblings stand in the shadow of

their father, both facing very different and daunting paths ahead of his succession.

Jiro's spirit and his traditional family values were forged at an early age. Despite being told that the history of sushi was already so long that nothing new could be invented, the young chef had sushi in his dreams. "I would jump out of bed at night with ideas," he recalls with a glint in his eye. He not only created new dishes but, like all great pioneers, he continues to refine the classics.

This commitment to innovation is evident in every kitchen scene, as his team work in quiet reverence to their sage-like head chef, their customers and their ingredients. The exquisite seven-course items they create is what a top Tokyo food critic describes as akin to a concerto divided into movements, with classics such as tuna in the first, followed by a catch-of-the-day cadenza and then a traditional omelette finale. And it's all overseen by Jiro, the conductor.

But after 75 years at the top of his game - a time during which the sushi boom saw massive

changes in the availability of quality fish - Jiro and his sons seem acutely aware that the timeless comes first in the shokusan spirit. It both why and how the aging chef keeps going. While Takashi, the younger, more competitive son, breaks away to start his own successful branch of the restaurant, his dutiful older brother, Yoshikazu, must eventually succeed Jiro, with the knowledge that he may never surpass his father's brilliance. **LEIGH CROFT**

ANTICIPATION: As vintage as sushi chef documentaries? Hmm...

3

ENJOYMENT: Sushi and symphonies with a brief bow to sustainability.

4

IN RETROSPECT: A beautiful ode to an artisan and his culture.

4

Quartet

Directed by **DUSTIN HOFFMAN**
 Starring **MAGGIE SMITH,**
TOM COURTENAY, BILLY CONNOLLY
 Released 4 JANUARY



Yes, you read that right: kate Directed by Dustin Hoffman. Aside from his (questionable) work as co-director on Uta Grensbach's 1978 crime flick *Straight Time*, this is, at the age of 78, Hoffman's first time behind the tiller. And, frankly, it's an auspicious and somewhat anonymous effort that fails to evoke any of the charm he's able to so effortlessly conjure when the lens is trained on him.

Witlessly hopping on the *Best Actor Margot* Hotel gravy train in search of the coveted 'silver dollar,' *Quartet* is a featherlight ensemble comedy based on a third-tier script by Ronald Harwood and set in the neatly, out-painted confines of a grandiose retirement home for classical musicians. Sweeping aside the downer anxiety of impending mortality, the film instead focuses on four central characters and their life-affirming efforts to get the band back together for one last concert and save the building from closure (as, really).

Billy Connolly plays to type as prank monkey-in-chief, with his character suffering from a hilarious brain defect which means he can't help himself from gawping the staff and referring to his esteemed colleagues as 'Pang's.' Then there's angelic and Peaches Collins, who makes crippling dementia look positively cute. But at the centre, we're gifted a pair of lovely performances from Maggie Smith and Tom Courtenay, the latter delivering an especially soulful turn as a world-weary solo who remains hanging on as a shortie past romance.

Hoffman is clearly a more gifted director of actors than he is at employing the camera as a tool to do something more than tastelessly reward things as they happen. But it's interesting that this beloved mature performer would chose to work from this material, perhaps articulating a belief that creativity, once ignited, never leaves you. One of the film's most moving motifs addresses the idea that, through physical and

mental decay, the inhabitants of the home are slowly losing the ability to do the thing they love. Hoffman has clearly made this film as a caution call to embrace creativity up to the very moment your body will no longer allow it. **D.W.D.JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION *Hoffman's offbeat screen presence might make this one to watch* **3**

ENJOYMENT *A scattering of snail, lovely moments, but hardly setting the screen alight, especially with its top cast ending* **2**

IN RETROSPECT *It's no Best Actor, Margot Hotel. But what is there days?* **2**

Lore

Directed by **CATE SHORTLAND**
 Starring **SASKIA ROSENDAHL,**
NELE TREBS, KAI MALINA
 Released 22 FEBRUARY



How's this for a provocative smug? Unrepentant middle-class Nazi children are - *Ladenhausen* ar' all - quoted into the suffering German countryside as the regime topples around them. This time the central protagonist is a feisty young arien woman, and she remains fully in thrust to the glory of Germany and unshakably repaid by the Jewish race.

Lore is an evocative German language drama by Australian director Cate Shortland and though it is primarily an investigation into how suffering, poverty and humiliation can swing towards altering our ingrained political ideals, it's also a film which takes a tiny-tapsey look how we identify with 'struggling women' in cinema. *Lore*, ably played by Saskia Rosendahl, is named guardian of her four younger siblings while her parents feverishly stored the evidence of their long-term Nazi complicity. The kids are then

packed off on a daunting 900km cross-country trek to the sanctuary of their grandmother in the North, and though their path is beset by a country's staggering war wounds, their only accomplice is an emaciated and mysterious Jewish drifter named Thomas (Kai Malina).

It's a plush and strangely ornate film despite the bleak setting and there's always the sense that Shortland is perhaps more interested in making a cringed, up-market costume drama in the mould of Jane Campion's *Bright Star* than she is about life survival: more with dirt under its fingernails. She necessarily beautifies the squalor and matters of tone are not helped by Max Richter's swelling and hysterically tickled neo-classical score.

But for all its stylistic overstatement, *Lore* still resonates (albeit mildly) as a story about innocence lost and found. The young characters developed and practiced their vile ideology

without ever being party to the atrocities of the Nazi race grinder. When presented with the full horror of their beloved cause, *Lore*'s innocence is at first questioned, then corrupted, then brutally overturned. **D.W.D.JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION *Cate Shortland went a little off-the-red for following her 2004 debut *Sunrise* with* **3**

ENJOYMENT *The melodramatic performances and plush settings make this a very easy watch.* **3**

IN RETROSPECT *Certainly sounds good on paper. But a little shallow and overstated in reality* **2**



Jack Reacher

Directed by CHRISTOPHER MCQUARRIE

Starring TOM CRUISE, ROSAMUND PIKE, WERNER HERZOG

Released 26 DECEMBER

Eyebrows were raised when the announcement was made that Tom Cruise had lugged the lead in a major adaptation of Lee Child's 2005 novel *One Shot*. Understandably so: Child's barrel-chested, dirty blond protagonist stands a skyscraper 6'5" and is renowned for his stoic, senseless demeanor — attributes Cruise can hardly claim to possess.

In Christopher McQuarrie's film, however, it's not Reacher's size or strength that matter so much as his ability to always be thinking two moves ahead. Reacher's extensive technical and military knowledge, photographic memory and uncannily accurate internal clock make him something of a superhuman arbiter. In the world of Tom Cruise, action star, of course, anything is possible. And yet despite being the best man for the job, not even *The Mission's* powers of seduction are enough to rescue this flat if floating spectacular conspiracy thriller.

It all starts so promisingly: In an awesome video game-inspired opening sequence, a lone gunman flase his crosshairs on a rush-hour promenade. Six shots. Five dead. The crime scene is littered with clues all pointing

to a former Army sniper with a blotched mental health record. It's a slam-dunk case. But the suspect vehemently denies all charges, thickening the plot by spurring a loaded detective at the arresting officers: 'Get Jack Reacher.'

Before anyone has time to pick up the phone, though, Reacher arrives on the scene with the meekness suggest of an all-star quarterback. Despite the overwhelming evidence stacked against the accused, Reacher is convinced of his innocence. And so with the help of spunky defense attorney Helen Rodin (Rosamund Pike) he sets out to prove just that, inadvertently unrolling a cover-up engineered by a notorious ex-GI/gay prisoner known simply as The Zec (Werner Herzog) for reasons that never fully become clear.

Reacher is a cool customer. As comfortable handling a Chevy Chevelle in a high-speed chase as he is an automatic weapon in a drenched quarry or, for that matter, himself in a street fight. He's also a bit of a dick — confidently wrong, patronizing to the authority figures around him and chauvinistic to a fault. If recent genre archetypes like Jason Bourne and *T* a lesser

extent Daniel-Craig's 007 have proven anything, it's that today's action hero needs to be capable of pulling off extraordinary feats of mental and physical prowess while still displaying genuine human emotion. You can snag the biggest movie star of his generation, deliver thrilling set piece after thrilling set piece, even get Werner Herzig to play the villain, but it all counts for nothing if your film (and potential franchise) hinges on a character who's totally out of time. **ADAM WOODWARD**

ANTICIPATION: Can Tom Cruise make the heights of *Ghost Protocol*?

3

ENJOYMENT: *Sadly not*, though like the similarly named *Knight And Day*, Jack Reacher has its moments.

3

IN RETROSPECT: There's no room for Reacher in modern cinema's action crowd.

2

Remo: Unarmed And Dangerous

DIRECTED BY
Guy Hamilton

TAGLINE

(1985)

*There is an Eleventh
Commandment: "Thou shalt
not get away with it." This
Commandment has a name:
REMO WILLIAMS.*

STARRING
**Fred Ward, Joel Grey,
Wilford Brimley**

TRAILERS
**Nin-Nah
Paddywhack, TR7:
The Movie, Tears Of
The Silver Panda**

CHERRYPICK

*"All I can promise you
is terror for breakfast,
pressure for lunch and
aggravation for sleep!"*



FEATURE

Go into any music shop and you'll find an Easy Listening section. You'll likely be met with shelves of understanding, middle-of-the-road dinner jazz, Frank Sinatra doo-be-doo-ing his drunken, Mebbled-up son off, and James Last coo-boling The Beatles. It's a safe, warm, agreeably tepid haven for music lovers who have no time for psych rock, grime-core or wong stomp.

And yet there is no such compromise to aide us your local video store. No racks set aside for acres of excitement-neutral, box-ticking, cackles-outlet knock-offs. Where is the goofy, ill-conceived clatrap and cloy, predictable sequel? And if 'Easy Watching' doesn't grab you, we can change that easily enough. "Tired Of Lulu," maybe? Or 'Meat And Two Veg'? And if we were feeling clever, perhaps 'Nothing To See Here'?

If you build it, they will come. And if they did, they would find that *Remo: Unarmed And Dangerous* – affable, dopey, lazy – was arguably the king-boss daddy of the genre. Its the number one pick for all those old souls who prize the basic, age-old qualities of affability, solidity and familiarity above such faddish, transient, crowd-pleasing add-ons as sensation, tension or bluescreen razzle-dazzle.

Remo: Unarmed And Dangerous, starring Fred Ward as a non-retellable jargon BoboCop analogue, is a dull, one-note, lingers-fine. Yet you know where you are with a film like *Remo*. It will never surprise you, never cheat on you, never pass on your parade and then tell you it's raining.

Ward, falling back on his patented 'Fred Ward' character – a wealthy, non-violent tag who mistakenly believes himself to be a smartass – plays a brutally misanthropic best cop 'killed' in the line of duty. Subsequently resurrected by a shady government spy

cadre led by aging conguiter wuz Wilford Brimley, his fabled Polack carcass is turned over to the cruel tube lugs of a wretched Korean martial arts instructor/aerobical lunatic named Chan until such time as he is proficient enough in 'kung-fu' to unleash his one-inch punches and rapidly boiler on an unending world.

Chan teaches Remo to dodge bullets, spin any phrase into a quasi-mystical Oriental zinger and the crate Buddha introduces layered deep within his favourite daytime soap opera, *Thoulessman Ward Rite*. The filmmakers rack some righteous wrath by casting a whole character actor to play Chan, and just to make doubly sure that they offend at least someone, the actor in question is Joel Grey, most famous as the transsexual Nazi helicopter Master of Ceremonies in *Cabaret*.

Soon Remo is out in the world where his first mission requires none of said training, but rather that he be chased around the Statue O Liberty by a trio of murderers, hard-hatted construction workers for the entirety of their lunch hour. These looney, meditative Teamsters – who presumably have thuglike mart-pugs, firearms, responsibilities and moral compasses – seem happy to risk it all in order to kill a man in broad daylight for little more than thirty nudges and a spot of beer money.

And though it all, *Remo* maintains an even strain. While other films might have tested our patience by cracking open some plot or getting all 'up in our faces' with a string of promising situations, *Unarmed And Dangerous* plays the long game. It offers up an adult-variant take on *The Ronin* (it's back on an A-Team budget (two-part episode)). Both the serious and the larc, *Remo* is busy going nowhere fast, while simultaneously plodding toward a flimsy, welcome conclusion. **B**



Hitchcock

Directed by SACHA GERVAISI

Starring ANTHONY HOPKINS, HELEN MIRREN, MICHAEL WINCOTT

Released 8 FEBRUARY

S erial killer Ed Gein (Michael Wincott) kicks off Sacha Gervais's *Hitchcock* with a resounding statement: he won a shovel to paralyze his first victim to death. When the camera pans to the right, it reveals a slightly revolted yet deeply intrigued Alfred Hitchcock (Anthony Hopkins) watching the heinous action unfold from a mere few feet away. It immediately connects the mass murderer and iconic filmmaker in a darkly comic way. If only the rest of *Hitchcock* were as interested in the morbid relationship between true crime and art as this spatially dynamic time capsule.

History tells us that Gein committed more murders - many more, in fact - and his horrific exploits would inspire Robert Bloch's 1959 novel *Psycho* and Hitchcock's classic 1960 film of the same name. But in a strange and somewhat disturbing way, Gein is also the jet-black soul of Gervais's otherwise maddling biopic, appearing throughout like a ghostly mentor to promote Hitchcock's darkest urges and sadistic tendencies. Their surreal scenes together crackle with intensity and uncertainty, proving that Hitchcock's artistic ingenuity and exterior confidence are merely masks to ease from disintegration.

Much of *Hitchcock* follows the embattled filmmaker as he attempts to overcome these demons while circumventing Hollywood gossip

and economic blockades to fund, cast, direct and edit *Psycho*. Deemed too old to tackle such seamy material by various studios, Hitchcock rebels against convention and self-finances the film, much to the chagrin of Paramount Pictures, who wants him to tackle something safer and ensure a return on investment.

Once on set, the film portrays Janet Leigh (Scarlett Johansson) as a sexy, classy and artistically game actress who serves Hitchcock's intense directing process. Anthony Perkins (James D'Arcy) comes across as a wide-eyed sponge willing to soak up Hitch's particular brand of crazy in order to inhabit the character of Norman Bates. But *Hitchcock* is not about film directing or acting or even the ebbs and flows of the artistic process.

The tumult and unpredictability inherent to the film production is often pushed to the background in favor of melodrama concerning Hitchcock's faltering relationship with his longtime collaborator and wife Alma Reville (Helen Mirren). Seeds of *Twist* and *Journey to the End of the Night* flower as both dies, especially when a charming novelist (Daisy Hunter) courts Alma to help edit his latest book.

This friction sets the stage for verbal standoffs aplenty that collectively hint at the possibility of brutal violence, either through shades of voyeurism or crescendos of noise

used to convey psychological fragility. It's not surprising that Gein often materializes when Hitchcock reaches the pinnacle of his rage.

Still, Gervais - a director best known for his 2008 documentary *Amélie: The Story of Amélie* - seems entirely overwhelmed by the historical and cultural weight of his subject, unsure of which tone to embrace. There are plenty of clever bits about Hitchcock and film history in general (*Vertigo* and *Windows '73* are both referenced as pejorative), but the film lacks any cohesive visual style or dynamic audio design to bring all together. The line between sanity and insanity, life and death, Hitchcock and Gein may be a thin red one, but the film filmmaker has the tools then or does to ensure why. **GLENN HEATH JR.**

ANTICIPATION. Another biopic that's all filler and no kiffer?

2

ENJOYMENT. *Hitchcock*'s darker impulses are repressed in favor of timid melodrama and historical reconstruction.

2

IN RETROSPECT. Unlike *Hitchcock*'s work, it feels from memory almost immediately.

2



Hyde Park On Hudson

Directed by **ROGER MICHELL**
 Starring **BILL MURRAY, LAURA LINNEY, OLIVIA WILLIAMS**
 Released **1 FEBRUARY**

Even before it leaves the starting blocks, *Hyde Park On Hudson* has the odds stacked against it. Though it's set across the pond, chronologically speaking, it picks up where *The King's Speech* left off—leading many to accuse it of riding on the warbler film's brili- castish and cynically groping for Oscar glory. That seems a little unfair, so director Roger Michell has said the film was in the works long before *The King's Speech* was even written. So we ought to judge it on its own terms, right?

On the one hand, *Hyde Park On Hudson* is the everywoman tale of Margaret "Daisy" Stuckley (Laura Linney), the fifth and wordy naïve cousin of the aging Franklin Roosevelt, who, as this film has it, was thrust into the then-President's inner circle after becoming entranced by his stamp collection (no, that's not a euphemism).

There's a far from subtle dramatic contrivance, which is the 1939 encounter between George VI and Roosevelt that famously marked the first visit of an English King to a U.S. President. Apparently, it was a forum for running jokes about how we Brits don't vote for our king and much royal outrage at the prospect of being served ketchup at an official celebratory lunch.

The problem is, there's no discernible reason why these two threads could or

should tie together. Dramatically, one has no significant impact on the other. It's the stuff of warmly anachronistic, too-time-come-try-a-checky-but-ultimately-reverential take on the unlikely coming together of two historical figures (here *The King's Speech* companions become inevitable), which paved the way for the Special Relationship.

Daisy's story, meanwhile, smoothed over by Linney's breezy nonchalance and steeped in out-dated nostalgia, is played as a letter-perfect romance—but this contrived love sits uneasily with the facts, even as screenwriter Richard Nelson would have them. One example of this is Daisy's painful discovery that she's merely one in a line of Roosevelt's extra-marital gosses (a potentially disposable one at that). Though ultimately she, like this film, struggles to even begin getting her head around the complexities of the Roosevelt's romantic peccadilloes, not least Eleanor's alleged lesbian affairs.

It's a shame, because had Nelson's script (adapted from his original radio play) succeeded in disentangling these two elements, *Hyde Park On Hudson* could have had the makings of a captivating historical drama. As it is, the film constantly lulls between two stiffs, making little of its brilliant cast along the way. Granted,

Bill Murray gets a fair crack of the whip as the formidable but physically vulnerable FDR, but Olivia Williams (Eleanor) and Olivia Colman (the Queen Mother) are resigned to polite scenery-chewing and tea-sipping. It doesn't help that the film proceeds at the pace of a warmed lettuce, like cinematic soma, it seems not to irritate the viewer into submission. Led by Jeremy Sacks's overbearingly insipid score, everything on its surface seems to yell: Drink me! as though it were a hearty mug of warming, Academy-blend cocoa. Just mind it doesn't catch in your throat. **SOPHIE HAN**

ANTICIPATION. Typical! You wait bloody ages for a biopic of George VI and then...

3

ENJOYMENT. Okay, so it's not actually another biopic of George VI. But it might make you ever want to eat a hotdog again.

2

IN RETROSPECT. A frustrating, wasted opportunity, destined to remain in the shadow of its cinematic sibling.

2



American Mary

Directed by JEN SOSKA, SYLVIA SOSKA
 Starring KATHARINE ISABELLE, ANTONIO CUPO, THISTAN RISK
 Released 11 JANUARY

American Mary opens with fragmented images of a turkey if this is a self-conscious expression of anxiety from writers/directors Jen and Sylvia Soska—whose assembly greenhouse-aping debut *Dead Hooker in A Trunk* might easily have been overlooked for gluttony and stuffing—the twin sisters can put their women to rest. For *American Mary*, though similarly transgressive in spirit, it takes ahead in quality and craft.

The turkey is also an iconic symbol of America's foundational values. Although here, the bird is not being sliced up for a Thanksgiving dinner, but stitched back together into an avian Frankenstein's monster. Likewise the ladies are taking a knife to the corpses of American myths and pervasively modifying the severed parts into a wholly new kind of cinematic creation. *American Mary* may be very entertaining, but it also leaves viewers with plenty to dissect, right from the first word of its provocative title.

The person reconstituting said turkey is Mary Mason (the astonishing Katharine Isabelle), a medical student in Aberdeen, Washington, who is practicing her surgical skills at home. In many ways, Mary embodies the American dream, warts and all, on the one

hand she is hard-working, ambitious, talented and naturalised (her family comes from Budapest), while on the other she is debt-ridden and entering a male-dominated professional world that regards her as a plaything for abuse and exploitation. Unable to pay her mounting bills, she turns to the seedy Boucher-A-Go-Go to get work as a stripper. But seeing her resource, club owner Billy Barber (Antonio Cupo) instead offers her some off, cash-in-hand pig-to-perform some illegal surgery down in the basement.

Soon Boucher-A-Go-Go dancer and surgically enhanced Betty Zoop look-alike Beatrix (Thristan Risk) is introducing Mary to Ruby Breakin' (Paula Lindberg), a wealthy fashion designer who desires "an unconventional operation for cosmetic purposes." And so Mary discovers the murky community of extreme body modification fanatics. Horrifiedly objectified and betrayed by her more "respectable" medical fraternity, Mary begins, not unlike the Soskas themselves, to carve a niche for herself in an alternative, underground movement that gradually allows her to achieve independence.

Mary is on a strange, twisted journey, reinventing herself and reconfiguring others

Her very elusiveness as a character, expertly modulated by Isabelle (as it reflects) in the film's chambered form, logging off the extremes from romance, revenge's tragedy, body horror and road movie and stitching them all back together into a feminist rite of passage and a satirical surgical strike against the American dream.

And here, as in Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932), "normal" society is shown in a rather dim light from the perspective of the sideshow attractions. **ANTHONY RIEL**

ANTICIPATION. From the writers/directors of transgressive trash *Dead Hooker in A Trunk*...

3

ENJOYMENT. comes a wholly new slice of feminist psychological, surgical horror

4

IN RETROSPECT. A satirical career-ug of American patriarchy and a rallying cry for marginalised sub cultures

5



The Impossible

Directed by **JUAN ANTONIO BAYONA**
 Starring **NAOMI WATTS, EWAN MCGREGOR, TOM HOLLAND**
 Released 4 JANUARY

In a disaster movie, destruction is the point. We've given all the fun of watching the world as it falls to pieces and then we get to step outside the cinema and carry on with our lives. *The Impossible* is a movie that fits squarely into this tradition and the fact that it's based on the true story of a Spanish family who got swept away by the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami doesn't prevent writer Sergio G. Sanchez and director Juan Antonio Bayona, who previously worked together on Spanish chiller *The Orphanage*, from reveling in the chaos and gore. There are entire 10-minute stretches where some may prefer to peek through their fingers.

Even though the film's emotional climax should be its dramatic apex, nothing can live up to the moment that the wave hits in the opening act. There's a far-off, sub-bass rumble. Household items begin to tremble. *Jurassic Park*-style Tux figures, frozen in awe, realise it's too late to run. *The Bear* gets louder and louder, enveloping us, and then...
 ...wham! Black Silence.

Bayona and Sanchez know that this is their big money shot. It's why they reveal the moment at the end of the film from terrifying

new angles, as one character relives the horror in a dream. This would be interesting if the movie made any sincere effort to get inside its victims' minds, but like they say, this isn't that kind of movie. It's about spectacular effects and a satisfying narrative that strings them together. People cry when they're sad, shout when they're angry and, at one point, have that classic conversation about how some stars burn out before their light reaches us, to make a spurious point about hope.

Watts and McGregor are both robust, likable actors who convince in their roles as the mother and father of three young boys – now British, rather than Spanish – who are holidaying in Thailand when disaster strikes. Watts is required to do little more than groan in anguish, sob softly and turn more and more purple until she looks like an extra from *The Walking Dead*. McGregor gets some slapstick wisecracks but no visible injuries other than a very scratch across his cheekbone. It just doesn't work.

Between them they carry the film, even though the child actors aren't up to the job. It's when the youngsters talk that you can hear the cracks in the dialogue. We shouldn't place

too much blame on Tom Holland, 16, who has a tough job (a substantial role, but it's hard to keep a child suspended when he delivers lines like, "Mum, look at you, we need help, we cannot risk it" with all the emotion and torment of a soldier who's just loaded me into the bunker).

Thrillers based on real stories are nothing new, but the Boxing Day tsunami happened only eight years ago and claimed around 300,000 lives – the equivalent to a thousand 9/11s. The fact that the catastrophe happened 8,000 miles from Hollywood (and 6,000 from Madrid) goes some way towards explaining why it's treated here with all of the sensitivity and ambiguity of *Amélie*. **JESS BERRILL**

ANTICIPATION. *Ewan McGregor has not been known for his stellar film choices of late*

2

ENJOYMENT. *Arggh! Nnnnn! Shit! Did you see that? Ooh! Aw! Ooh!*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *Kind of offensive when you think about it*

1



The Sessions

Directed by BEN LEWIS

Starring JOHN HAWKES, HELEN HUNT, WILLIAM H. MACY

Released 18 JANUARY

Cinema tends to deal with disability through fantasy or cash-handed over-compensation. We're too often served a rolling messiah like X-Men's Dr Xosier or the wise-cracking emotional resilience of Herman O'Donnell's wheelchair-bound heartmelter, *Invisible Man*. *Dancing With the Stars* is admirable, but there's the constant feeling that disabled characters like these remain ciphers for a writer's message.

What gave 65-year-old Ben Lewis's first directorial outing its 18 years a feeling of freshness is its willingness to confront the fear and loss experienced by its central protagonist even as the film plays out a warm rom-com narrative. It's about a man and a woman and about how losing your virginity at whatever age is a bit like climbing a mountain. That peak where you long to plant your flag like your consciousness. It seems insurmountable and becomes a source of fear, excitement and a place of imagined transformative power.

Lewis, who still suffers the effects of childhood polio, was looking for "sterile material" about disabled sex for his screen idea. The *Globe* when he discovered poet and journalist Mark O'Brien's article, 'On Seeing a Sex Surrogate'. In it, O'Brien detailed how, aged 38, he became determined to pop his cherry and become a proper man. The only obstacles in his

way were a total lack of muscle control from the neck down plus the fact that he lived inside an iron lung. Other than that, this tiger was ready to pounce. Lewis forgot *The Glass* (perhaps wisely) and decided to film this story instead.

O'Brien, an the rebound after discovering his sexy, lovely career lover had but "not in that way" is scrupulously committed to write a story on disabled sex by a magazine. The job leads him to sex therapist Cheryl (who acts as a 'surrogate' for her clients in a six-session programme that combines psychotherapy with all-the-way physical intimacy). During the course of the sessions that give the film its structure, drive and title - from *Body Awareness* through to O'Brien's ascent to the summit of his sexual ambitions - we're invited into a relationship of sometimes unbearable intimacy.

John Hawkes as O'Brien and Helen Hunt as Cheryl are fearless in their many nude scenes - no soft lighting or flinching cutaways here, but plenty of hugs, taps and tap marks in male daytime settings that emphasise the essential honesty of their characters. Hawkes in particular is magnificent throughout and, although much has been made of the contortions he put his body through to approximate the realistic curvature of his subject's spine, it will be on his and Hunt's funny, truthful repartee that critical and commercial plaudits will rest.

Despite success at the Sundance Film Festival, *The Sessions* is perhaps too complex in tone and too workmanlike - or just too restrained? - in its visual construction, score and direction to find itself as low for any big awards. It is, however, an accomplished love story and, in itself, a transformative and touching correction to the notion that stories about the disabled are interminably stories about disability. **PHILIP LUGG**

ANTICIPATION. Outstanding cast, but 'same' films are best left to Hellmark TV

2

ENJOYMENT. Snappy dialogue and that magnetic female structure make for a lean, incisive experience but it feels a little light at times

3

IN RETROSPECT. As *Are* comes the thought-provoking parts three days after viewing the film's questioning generosity and sense of perspective will still be knocking around your head

4

John Hawkes

If acting is a physical craft, how do you set about portraying someone who's paralyzed from the neck down and confined day-and-night to an iron lung? It's an unusual challenge, one scaled with method-like conviction by John Hawkes in Ben Lawen's *The Sessions*, whom he plays Mark O'Brien, a devoutly Catholic quadriplegic polio victim and poet who hires a sex surrogate to pop his cherry. L'WLER sat down with the self-effacing indie star to get the skinny on his outstanding performance.

LW: Ben When did you first hear of Mark O'Brien's story?

Hawkes: I'd had some luck after the movie *Winter's Bone* where I was getting sent a lot of scripts to read and *The Sessions* was on that pile. I thought it was a really terrific story, the character was interesting and well written and fascinating to me.

'Polio victim in an iron lung looking to lose his virginity' must just jump off the page at you, right?

Yeah, I mean you read one of those every week but this was the best of those. I'm just kidding, I didn't read anything like it before. Certainly it's not unprecedented, there are other stories where the lead character is quite incapacitated on one level or another. But this was the first one that had been sent my way that was of that ilk.

Did you have any initial reservations about playing the part?

For sure, my first question to Ben [Lawen] was, "Why tell a disabled actor?" That was the first thing I wrote on the script as I was reading it through. For two reasons, one being altruistic in that it's an underrepresented group of actors and I'm a somewhat caring person, at least about those around me. The other being more selfish in that I didn't think I could be more effective in the role than someone who has been through that experience. But there aren't really that many seriously affected polio victims left and part of that is to do with the fact that the virus has been eradicated in the western hemisphere for the most part. I didn't realize till our meeting that Ben had suffered from polio himself — he got it when he was six years old. That made me feel a little less worried about the prospect. The other major concern was the idea of playing a character with only 90-degree movement of his head. But the script was as entertaining to read and so vibrant that I thought it would probably translate really well into film.

Didn't help having Ben there, as someone with first-hand experience of polio?

I think so, but there were so many tools given to me by the people who knew Mark — from Jessica Yula's phenomenal short documentary called *Breathing Lessons* to a lot of writing Mark left behind as a journalist, an essayist, a book reviewer and, chiefly, a poet. It was so exciting for me to read the autobiography that he'd written, *How I Became A Man*. Being Ben there were a lot of questions answered by that and by these people, but I still had a lot of questions for Ben — "What is that like?" How do you feel?" I was surprised that someone could be paralyzed from the neck down and yet still have their poems work, still have sensation in those. I asked a lot of questions about sensation and although I didn't lean on him a lot in terms of the physical aspects of the role, I'd say that his input was valuable.

What was the toughest aspect of playing Mark?

It was mentioned in the script that Mark's spine was horribly curved and I felt like I needed to replicate that somehow. I thought it would be hard to hold myself in a curved position through long takes so, with the help of the props women, I conceived and made a soccer-ball sized piece of firm foam rubber wrapped with duct tape that we stuck real way under the left side of my back throughout filming and that gave me a pretty horrific curve of my spine. Mark's autobiography talks about how each part of his body is uniquely treated and in Jessica Yula's documentary I could see that, so I wanted to replicate that. It was very uncomfortable and it was painful to lie in that position, especially during wide-angle shots when I couldn't move. Also the iron lung itself took time to get in and out of. So I think that the most difficult times during filming were the 45 minutes where I'd have to stay in the iron lung in between takes — because it would be easier to be there than to get out. There was no time for massages and I was in quite a bit of pain for long periods of time.

How long did you have to prepare for the part?

Five days to have a couple of months. A lot of times you'll have a week or two weeks to prepare for a role but with this one, because there was so much to learn, it was a great luxury to have that much time. I did try to really emulate the Mark that I saw in *Breathing Lessons*. I feel that the more specific you can be in truthful details when you tell a story then the more universal that story will become for people. People get it more if you delve into the truth, even if it's a foreign world or a foreign character. That was one reason why I poured over every detail of Mark's world. **B**





For Ellen

Directed by **SO YONG KIM**
 Starring **PAUL DANO, SHAYLENA MANDIGO, JON HEDER**
Releases 12 FEBRUARY

In *Between Days*, established Korean-American writer, director and producer So Yong Kim as a storyteller of great subtlety. Depicted in long, naturalistic takes, her characters were rendered motivated by everyday confusions. Six years later, her first English-language feature does away with the subtitles but keeps the sound of silence resented up high.

Legally summoned from his Chicago home by soon-to-be-ex-wife Claire (Margaret Leaver), angry goth-rocker Joby (Paul Dano) takes a long drive to the cold and desolate town of Maumee, NY. Lingering shots of this sullen, black-clad figure moving against a frozen white landscape symbolize the disenchanted feelings to every scene.

Dano's dour features are striking and the gulf between his impression of innocence and the indecency he bottles up inside him is deeply unsettling. Playing an author in *Italy Speaks*, his dark side was submerged beneath a jovial, peevish manner. Joby's a more combustible beast. His attempt to coax Claire out for a conciliatory coffee turns nasty when she doesn't answer. Frustrated, hell from his legs. Frags to Dano that he was able to make this lonely unhappy man even remotely bearable.

Events surrounding his fractured marriage are shrouded in mystery. The script and camera focus on Dano, staying protectively away from Claire as if she's suffered enough. We're stuck with Joby and the minutiae of how he handles personal issues.

With the story refusing to go faster than a plod and little human interaction for release, we're constantly pushed uncomfortably close to the protagonist. Kim's slow-burning narrative sometimes leads to poignancy, sometimes to dead air.

The catalyst for something approaching development is the news that Claire wants Joby to sign away his paternal rights to a casually introduced daughter, Ellen (Shaylena Mandigo). Joby decides to stay and fight. For Ellen, however much as this suddenly orphaned daughter is about anything concrete, it's a character study of a man contemplating the advantages of giving a damn.

Mandigo, a non-actor Kim recruited at a school, provides a splash of enraging sweetness and maturity. As is Kim's second feature *Trunkless Man*, this neglected child embodies more maturity and poise than the wayward adult guardian she's left with.

The scenes in which a desperate Joby makes small talk with Ellen devastate. Hand-held camerawork creates the impression that this is the world's most intrusive documentary.

Yet such is the overall starkness of time that most ingredients only overwhelm. This is true of Mandigo, of the forced moments that are a shade too painful to be funny and of the startling observations that emanate from the static atmosphere. Just Malone's head turns as Joby's girlfriend, Susan, all but screams that new relationships need to leave space for old relationships. This is but one of the sage musings that pass through but find no place to settle in this barren land. **SOPHIE MONSIEUR**

ANTICIPATION. *A Sundance hit and vehicle for the great Paul Dano*

4

ENJOYMENT. *About as enjoyable as frustration and loneliness can be*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *A few Celsons away from professed.*

3



Side By Side

Directed by CHRISTOPHER KENNEALLY
Starring KEVIN REEVES, MARTIN SCORSESE, DAVID FINCHER
Released 12 FEBRUARY

You'd suspect that Kevin Reeves' *Behind the Lens* is the size of a ferns wheel on account of the winking platitude of showbiz pain he comes out for *Side By Side*, but Christopher Kenneally's bitchy, tech-focused examination of film's stuttering transition from a photochemical process to pixels captured on a high-sensitive panel (Reeves himself is the Marty DiLugli of the piece, attempting to delicately prod and needle his subjects into revealing their innermost secrets about the uncertain future of the medium).

So we've got David Fincher sweating like a chicken, Christopher Nolan wedding himself in good old celluloid, George Lucas coming across like an old geezer who likes to toke with toasters in his shed, Robert Rodriguez hungry to shoot quickly, cheaply and stylishly, and Martin Scorsese pointing out that a filmmaker's work is all for naught if the cinema projectionist – the last person in the grand transaction of filmmaking – doesn't do his job correctly.

It's a particularly leonine Steven Soderbergh who utters the film's best line: "When I first saw the Red One [digital camera], I wanted to call up film and tell it I'd met somebody."

The same you get with *Side By Side* is that we're seeing the soundtrack-driven highlights

of a much larger project, as the film hurtles from shooting to issues of practicality to colour correcting to processing to preservation and to exhibition, while only scratching the surface of each vast topic. Anne V Coates, instrumental in what many deem the greatest edit of all time (the 'match cut' in *Lawrence of Arabia*) is propped in front of the camera and then hurriedly disposed of. Yet the star-spangled participants add a kind of bizarre sex appeal to the potentially grey proceedings, and Reeves does well to fold the testimonies of this diverse array of specialists into one another.

Yet the overall feeling is that highly paid, entitled filmmakers are desperate to make it look like they are in total control over the format in which they shoot. Darryl Boyle claims that he and Anthony Boni Mustie would never have been able to make *Shogun* millions if shooting on film, but you still have to think of something like *The French Connection* or *Brazil* or anything by Jean Roch to wonder, why the hell not? The question of economics – is highly touched upon, but really boils like the heart of the entire debate.

(Ironically, the [digitally shot] film itself looks pretty dire, with lots of jarring film clips and

interviews in which the subject is speaking but the camera is locked on the panel, suggesting Reeves. And then, as if placing two pencils up its nose then slamming its face into a desk, the film ends by (boldly?) underlining everything that's come before it by having David Lynch rightly assert that, if the story's good enough, people don't care about format. There's something oddly self-defeating about constructing a series of strident arguments and then a jolly sounding as that, in the end, if you're not an industry nuthin' none of this actually matters. **DWID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION: *A Personal Journey With Kevin Reeves Through American Movies*

3

ENJOYMENT: *Informative, amusing, compelling. Like a DVD extra gone nuclear*

3

IN RETROSPECT: *The anecdotal pages, but Reeves' indifferent impartiality blocks any major revelations*

3



No

Directed by **PABLO LARRAÍN**

Starring **GABRIEL BERNAL, ALFREDO CASTRO, ANTONIA ZIGERS**

Released **8 FEBRUARY**

Since 1988 and through recent events, film the third and final instalment of Chilean director Pablo Larraín's trilogy exploring the effects of the Pinochet dictatorship and it follows the darkly comic one-two punch of *Yer no me acuerdo* and *Post Mortem*. This time, Larraín casts his eye over the changing role of the media in his country's politics.

Chief García Bernal stars as Rouse Sauvreda, a sleek, persuasive ad man enlisted by a coalition of anti-Pinochet parties to spearhead a 'No' campaign (a series of 15-minute political TV commercials) which aims to depose the dictator. Essentially figuring that a cowed public are unlikely to find inspiration in the grim, harrowing war-pics montages cooked up by the state, Sauvreda resolves to infuse the campaign with the same rebelliously cynical streak he brings to cheap ads for clients like Pirelli Cola.

Not everyone is on board with his radical approach ('This shit' came an old-schooler, before storming out of a meeting), but after some initial misfires, the slyly cynical campaign of positivity soon proves dramatically popular with the Chilean populace. It also provokes a fearfully calculated response from the 'Yes' team, who count among their number Sauvreda's ingratiating boss, played by fantastically sinister Larraín regular, Alfredo Castro.

With a gothic, understated style reminiscent of classic political thrillers like *Costa-Gavras'* *Z*, Larraín handles the narrative with wiffling economy, dipping deep into the details of both campaigns while the personal stakes rise incrementally - it's not long before the 'No' team come under pressure from Pinochet's thugs. And the escalating drama, he also deploys a genuine interest in his characters, with a focus on the growing tensions that develop in the 'No' camp and a number of tenderly observed moments between Sauvreda and his young son.

There's also an intriguing thread which tracks the ambiguous relationship between Sauvreda and his estranged activist wife Antonia Ziger, her passion and willingness to put her body on the line provide a stark counterpoint to Sauvreda's aloof and distanced campaign style.

As with Larraín's previous two films, there's also much humour to be found within the drama. With fond incursions, the director (who was 12 at the time of the referendum) mixes the kitsch rules of the era's pop-culture detritus to great effect and there's a fine running gag about the acceptable appearance of movie stars in all the media Sauvreda creates.

No's most striking - and potentially divisive - feature is its aesthetic. Larraín has opted to shoot on videotape on a vintage 1983 Umatic camera - the standard format for most news programmes until roughly 1990. With its shabby, over-saturated reds and lingering streaks of light, it's not always easy on the eye, but it's a bold choice which fosters a brooding stylistic unity and works as a direct challenge to perceived notions of authenticity in period reconstruction.

Like it or loath it, you'd be hard pressed not to see it as a staggering technical achievement, as it's almost impossible to tell where the extensive archive footage (including one of the real adverts) ends and the newly shot material begins. In an amazing way, it's as though Larraín is taking a lot out of Sauvreda's book in trying to sell us on the past with visual trickery: badly, it would be a dream.

The film's look also has a dramatic effect on Bernal, who is as magnetic as the videotape on which the film is shot. With his soulful stare and cat-glass cheekbones, he's still decidedly handsome, but deglamorised by the breeze, muddy lines on the videotape. The son of a political dissident, Sauvreda is a thoughtful, accessible character and it's a pleasure to watch him gradually develop across the course of the film, even if we never quite sure what's going on behind those big brown eyes.

His growing political consciousness, too, is ambiguously observed and far from a *Blameless* conversion. As *No* reaches its stirring finale, there's a hollowed-out look to Sauvreda, it's as if he's re-emerging the spiritual cost of his crucial involvement in a paradigm shift which has helped to remove a feared dictator, but paved the way for a new political climate of cynical cultural manipulation, viral advertising and bland celebrity endorsement. **ASHLEY CLARK**

ANTICIPATION. Pablo Larraín is one of the most exciting directors around

4

ENJOYMENT. Gripping, intelligent and complex neo-historical excavation

4

IN RETROSPECT. A reworking job.

4



Pablo Larraín



Director Pablo Larraín reveals the cinematic secrets behind his superb new film *No*.

No is the third and final part of Chilean director Pablo Larraín's 'Pinochet Trilogy', which began in 2006 with *Tory Moreno* and continued in 2010 with *Post Mortem*. IWLers met the director, who explained exactly how he put together this explosive political thriller which plays like *All The President's Men* but set in the world of late-'80s TV advertising.

1. Understand where your stories come from

"Each film I make springs organically from the previous one. When I did *Tory Moreno*, it wasn't originally going to be a political movie. I wanted, for some reason, to have this dancer who was also a serial killer. I wondered who he could be imitating. And then we thought of John Travolta in *Saturday Night Fever*. Then we saw that it was in 1978, right in the middle of the Pinochet regime in Chile, and then it became a political film. It became more interesting than the original idea. When we were editing that film, I was doing some Googling and I found Salvador Allende's autopsy report, which is a very strange document. It's a technical medical thing. And I thought it was fascinating as it captured the recent history of my country through the eyes of doctors. The description of the body, what he had in his pockets, was a metaphor for our society. So I decided to make *Post Mortem*. In between those films, someone came up with the idea of doing a film about the famous referendum from 1988 when we voted on ousting or retaining Pinochet as leader. I guess it remains the second most important day in the history of my country after the actual day of independence. So then we made *No*."

2. Don't think about what genre your film will be

"When we started talking about *No*, I said that if we made a dark comedy out of this we would probably be killed. This is not for amusement. Then we started working on it and it took a long, long time. We spoke to hundreds of people and looked at a lot of archive footage. When we had to fill in a film in order to send the film to a festival, there was this rehearsal. Genre: 'What's it going to be?' And we just decided to make it funny and dark and tense. We just thought we were going to feel good and free with it and if there's no way to fill that space on the form, then so be it. Or we'll just put down five different genres."

3. Draw on your personal memories

"I was 12 at the time of the referendum, so I don't remember much. But what I do remember is that when the campaign was aired on TV, it was like the national football team was playing in the World Cup. There was nobody on the streets. Everyone was watching it. No matter how political you were, you would be there. The entire country was just looking at these guys and thinking, 'What are they going to say?' They've got to put 10 years into 15 minutes! There was a friend of the family who was on the right and he said, 'I bet these guys are going to start attacking Pinochet.' And then it opens with this super optimistic, funny advertising look and it was completely shocking. Then the Yes came on the TV with these triumphant images that everyone had seen already. It wasn't shocking at all. This propaganda was permanently on TV, so it wasn't new. But with the 'No' campaign, I felt there was a new atmosphere. And it wasn't an intellectual thing. It's all etched on our memory."

4. Understand the subtext and relevance of your movie

"When you have the crossover between the political communication and advertising logic, what happens is that words end up meaning nothing. It's pretty interesting and dangerous at the same time. Pinochet imposed this model. We were in the midst of this social process, then Pinochet came in, killed a lot of people, brought in these Chicago boys and changed everything. And with that comes marketing: the idea of selling stuff. You need advertising to complete the equation. Essentially, Pinochet engineered his own downfall. He borrowed his own poison. In the last 34 years, we've been making the state smaller and smaller and smaller and companies are getting bigger and bigger and bigger. And today my country is owned by seven or eight guys. One of them happens to be the president, which is another issue. So we abused the system. We kept that logic."

5. Know who your heroes are

"I met Patricia Gurmán, director of *The Battle Of Chile* and *Nochevieja For The Light*, and we had dinner at the house of another documentary director. I just think he's so good. His movies are an amazing inspiration for me. All of them. I think *Nochevieja For The Light* is just so beautiful. He became a mature artist with that film. I think our work is connected, but his stuff is way more deep and interesting than mine. It has enormous artistic value. Compared to him, I'm just a beginner. Even sitting with him, I felt like a student. It's been great to see that in many of the countries I've been in, lots of people are making connections between our films. And I'm deeply proud of that!"

A Place In The Sun (1951)

Directed by **GEORGE STEVENS**
 Starring **MONTGOMERY CLIFT**,
ELIZABETH TAYLOR, **SHELLEY WINTERS**
 Released 1 FEBRUARY



The title suggests warmth and recognition, a suggestion that each person deserves a moment in the biggest spotlight of them all. What a tragic fraud. If the history of film now teaches us anything, it's that the work for comfort is only a privileged man's (and woman's) reality. So from the moment factory worker George Eastman (Montgomery Clift) sets his poor eyes on beautiful heiress Angela Vickers (Elizabeth Taylor) in *A Place In The Sun*, the young man's life is sealed by self-constructed delusions of grandeur.

Yet his fantasy is always strangely within reach. The film opens with George dutifully reporting to his wealthy uncle for employment, accepting a job on an assembly line with the hope of working his way up. Fortune is a virtue that most characters usually lack, but George has it in spades. While working diligently, he courts a homely lass named Alice (Shelley Winters) with whom it's love at first sight. The same can't be said of the gorgeous Angela, who completely ignores

him during their initial encounter in the lavish entryway of the Eastman family estate. Stevens sums up their class distance in one brilliant shot: George, wearing an ill-fitting suit, is positioned in background fender while Angela and her woman-like neck overpower the foreground conversation.

Angela notices George later, at her own convenience of course. Alas, it means, he has chance to share has arrived, if it isn't for the pesky, now pregnant Alice. As the screws tighten, George juggles two lives, two social experiences, and Clift's wonderfully reserved performance takes on a fidgety, nervous energy. This uneasiness is complemented by overlapping audio cues meant to realize his moral confusion. When reports of a bizarre accident come in via radio, the loud roar of spotlights gliding the very lake on which it occurred drowns out the news cast. Covering up the truth has never been easier.

George's rise and fall is rare in its near lack of violence or unnecessary melodrama.

Instead, his compromises add up. Stevens' camera keeps a fitting distance during the most damning sequences, respectful of the characters' privacy without losing the emotional impact of their words. It's all so brutally elegant, so deceptively thermal. **GLENN HENDERLIE**

ANTICIPATION. *Deemed a classic in some circles, but Stevens' film does it always correct* **3**

ENJOYMENT. *Class division and moral compromise as affecting backdrops of an interlarded noir* **4**

IN RETROSPECT. *Clift's mesmerizing, brave performance only deepens with time* **5**

I Wish

Directed by **HIDEAKI KUREEDA**
 Starring **KOJI YAKUSHI**,
OSHIRO MAEDA, **RYOGA KAWASHI**
 Released 22 FEBRUARY



While Steven Spielberg is off making opulent biopics of grand American presidents and sending shopping sprees to war, Japanese maestro Hideaki Kureeda has chosen to recapture the wide-eyed spirit of Spielberg. His *I Wish* is nothing short of glorious, an uncommonly cheerful pre-teen adventure yarn that feels like a rite-of-passage contemporary to films like *Stand By Me*, *The Goonies* and *ET*.

Two hoodlums, geographically split by warring parents, attempt to rescue the warm heart of family living by engineering an economic miracle. It is claimed that those who witness the exact moment where two Shinkansen trains pass by one another will have their wishes granted. And so a small train of three-high pool their resources, make their alibi and young into the countryside. As with his stunning 2008 film, *Still Walking*, Kureeda's film again explores about the emotional chasm between parents and their children. But where the earlier film was doused with melancholy, this is an unreservedly *joyous* ode to the secret lives of the young. In time-

honored road movie style, the central journey is used as a conceit to meet with the strange, disenfranchised folk on the fringes of society.

Sure, the plot is mild and all the action is overtaken by jarring, hyper-melodic acoustics, but it's most likely you'll have developed chronic facial RSI from smiling. And the performances from the helix-like cast are themselves nothing short of a miracle. **DWID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *Hideaki Kureeda is Japan's greatest working filmmaker. End of* **4**

ENJOYMENT. *Delightful use of the word 'I' hugging a rareness screen illegal soundbays?* **4**

IN RETROSPECT. *The spirit of Spielberg transplanted to the east. Bliss* **4**

A Liar's Autobiography – The Untrue Story Of Monty Python's Graham Chapman

Directed by **BILL JONES, JEFF SIMPSON, BEN TIMLETT**
Voices of **GRAHAM CHAPMAN, JOHN CLEESE, TERRY JONES**
Released 8 FEBRUARY



With roles as Brian of Nazareth, King Arthur and the plain-speaking Colonel character who regularly interrupted the flow of Monty Python whenever he felt things were "getting too silly", Graham Chapman occasionally appeared to be a loose cannon of anise and reason within the swinging madness of the Flying Circus. Offscreen, nothing could have been further from the truth.

His sage, tweed and paisley air – not to mention the fact that he was a fully qualified doctor – belied rampant alcoholism, genuine homosexuality and the courageous belief that often arose from being leucic mates with full-time enemy Keith Moon of The Who.

His 1980 memoir, *A Liar's Autobiography* (Villainy VU), is a loquacious mix of semi-fictionalized reminiscence and phantasmagoric distilled fever dreams. It's a slim, sprawling, strongly affecting book and one that hardly suggests itself to cinematic adaptation.

For play, then, to directors Bill Jones, Jeff Simpson and Ben Timlett for distilling any kind of straight-up biographical approach to such riotous material and instead presenting episodes from Chapman's life in a series of stylized animations produced by an army of graphic design houses. The rule with any such technique, however, is that it will fail to hold together a cohesive narrative and, sad to say, this is more often the case than not.

The opening hour is not only badly fractured but especially low on laughs as childhood holidays and schooling at Eton are presented in a stilted and straightforward manner. It's not until the final stretch that the films really bite stride, with Chapman's boozey, druggy, extended late-'70s LA sojourn presented as a kaleidoscopic tangle of star-studded pool parties and lucrative sex.

Those later sections – as well as an utterly surreal excursion into space with David Hockney and Alan Bennett – are spellbinding and far truer to the spirit of the book than the more animated transcription that makes up the early sections. It's a shame that the filmmakers didn't embrace this kind of sprawling chaos from the off – Chapman himself would have surely approved. **AMULETTES**

ANTICIPATION. *Python docs aren't exactly like on the ground.* **3**

ENJOYMENT. *A bit if not completely different the norm* **2**

IN RETROSPECT. *Fades in the wind all too quickly.* **2**

Grabbers

Directed by **JOE WRIGHT**
Starring **RICHARD COYLE, RUTH BRADLEY, RUSSELL TOVEY**
Released 26 DECEMBER



"You really are Irish," says marine ecologist Dr Adam Smith (Russell Tovey) to Garda Ciaran O'Shea, after the local policeman, under the influence of alcohol, has once again acted without forethought. Yet Smith's national stereotyping is slyly avowed by the fact that O'Shea is played by Richard Coyle, himself an Englishman, and often, thanks to his standard role in the TV comedy *Coupling*, mistakes for a Welshman.

If Smith sounds a tad defensive, he's not the only outsider on the fictional island of Ems Uighit Garda Linn Nalen (Ruth Bradley) has just come over from Dublin for a two week posting, there's an upstate of Eaters European builder whose unusable name reminds him against ever getting captured by the police, and even O'Shea is, in the opinion of gassy pub boothily Una (Borough Gallagher), just there

on "a bit of a substantial" while he drinks his way through the loss of his wife.

If all this sounds like a generic Irish comedy, having an amiable laugh at the mentally eccentric locals as much as at the many visitors, and all set in a locale reminiscent of Father Ted's Craggy Island, then that is exactly what Joe Wright's *Grabbers* offers. It is the kind of coolly staked view of the Republic, all gassy courtesies and friendly ease, that goes down as easy as a pint of Guinness with those viewers who long nostalgically for the Old Country.

Only there is another alien recently arrived on the island, that will (maybe) disrupt this winsome idyll – a rapidly breeding, voracious (and, most horrifying of all, totally) thing from outer space that has come to do a bit of its own weird fishing. It is, or rather they are, spectacularly reduced, its/their squaky oddness both terrifying

and kinda cute, which makes *Grabbers* an Irish tentacular Tremors – steadily creature feature with the emphasis on comedy and character, ending (not unlike *Shane Of The Swamp*) in a riotous pub booze-up, with human romance amidst all the extra-terrestrial reproduction. **AMPHIBOL**

ANTICIPATION. *Hoping for The Guard meets Invasion* **3**

ENJOYMENT. *...but very happy with Ballyknangel meets Tremors?* **4**

IN RETROSPECT. *Spectacular, tentacles, crew-filled fun, forgotten by morning* **3**



The Earrings Of Madame De... (1953)

Directed by **MAX OPHÜLS**
 Starring **DANIELLE BARRIEUX, CHARLES BOYER, VITTORIO DE SICA**
 Released 15 FEBRUARY

The four French films with which the German-born director Max Ophüls founded off his storied career are noted for evoking a greater level of opulence and for unfolding in a more baroque climate than the quartet of American films he made just prior to returning to Europe in 1956. Yet they're no less concerned with the plight of women in untenable circumstances, a commandment enforced by the director's famed camera movements which often seem to inscribe the characters in their arc.

While Ophüls' final three American movies, all crafted in the workable genre of the 1940s (not, the woman's picture), dealt with heroines who started out in modest or middle-class circumstances, with his penultimate film, the 1953 masterpiece *The Earrings of Madame De...*, the director turned his focus to an upper-crust wife living a luxurious but unsatisfying life in 18th-century France.

No matter if anything, Comtesse Louise (Danielle Bاريهux) lacks the agency of her less affluent American counterparts. Married to a prosperous general (Charles Boyer) and having no children, she has little to occupy her time save for the accumulation of endless expensive baubles and harmless flirtations at society events. The most significant of these baubles are the spectacular earrings of the film's title, a wedding present from her husband and an object whose constant changing of hands

throughout the course of the film triggers the movie's intricate and perfectly orchestrated plot mechanics.

In desperate financial straits, Louise sells the earrings back to the jeweler from whom her husband initially purchased them. The husband then buys them back a second time, only to give them to a mistress. She then sells them in Constantinople to pay a gambling debt where they're purchased by Italian nobleman Baron Donati (Vittorio de Sica), who becomes Louise's lover (a later line of dialogue suggests they haven't consummated their romance, but we're not meant to believe it), an affair that precipitates the film's inevitable tragedy.

The earrings, like most commodities, are worthless in themselves. They're only granted value by the import people attach to them. Thus, throughout the course of the film, as they move along their elliptical orbit, they take on meaning based on who is giving them to whom, just as their monetary value is dictated by terms that are at least partially arbitrary. So the earrings, once worthless to Louise, suddenly become a prized possession when they're offered to her as a gift from Donati. And only when they take on this value to the heroine are they granted the power to become her undoing.

The path traced by the earrings is only one of a series of interlocking circles on which the

film is built. This orbit is complemented by the circular movements of characters through stationary architecture, the circular glidings of Ophüls' camera and the glorious circles traced by Louise and Donati in a sequence of elliptical ballroom dances that dissolve several months into a few minutes of screen time. In the end, though, all these circles collapse, closing fatally in on the film's constructed heroines, left with nothing but inevitable decrees. The characters, caught between the warring forces of societal law and passion, are crushed, only the earrings, bald of sturdier stuff, remain. **ANDREW SCHENKER**

ANTICIPATION. For those who haven't caught up with Ophüls' masterpiece, you're the chance to do so on the big screen.

5

ENJOYMENT. The film's luxurious camera movements, delicious visuals, and affecting story are impossible to refuse.

5

IN RETROSPECT. Even in a career composed of little but high points, Ophüls' *Earrings* shines brightly.

5

**"Exquisite... beautifully observed
and impeccably executed"**

LOS ANGELES TIMES

"Paul Dano's best performance yet"

WASH POST

"Deeply sad and touching"

NY TIMES



FOR ELLEN

Paul Dano Jon Heder Jena Malone

Opens February 15th

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Wreck-It Ralph

Directed by **RICH MOORE**
 Starring **JOHN C. REILLY, JACK McHAWER, JANE LYNCH**
 Released **12 FEBRUARY**

Remember the opening credits of *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*, specifically the 8-bit remix of the Universal theme right at the top of the film? Well, judging by the first few moments of *Wreck-It Ralph*, so does someone over at Disney: the film employs the exact same concept for their own heavily pixelated intro sequence.

It's a cute, suitably retro touch, albeit one that exposes *Wreck-It Ralph*'s most conspicuous flaw: Sure, director Rich Moore's wonky animated pastiche throws together elements of *Toy Story*, *Monsters, Inc.*, and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, then piles on the classic videogame references faster than some the Hedgehog — the spiky blue Sega veteran who gets a suitably flowing cameo appearance early on. But by shamelessly riffing on other sources, *Wreck-It Ralph* struggles to establish its own identity.

The story focuses on John C. Reilly's iconic Ralph, a "bad guy" character in an old-fashioned, *Donkey Kong*-style platform game called *Pac-Man Fists*. Tired of playing the villain, Ralph sets out on a perilous mission that he hopes will earn him the respect of his peers.

Also, none of it makes any sense: The world of *Wreck-It Ralph* demands we accept that gaming characters are living, breathing

creatures who inhabit consoles and travel in and out of each others' games via the cables and plug sockets of the arcade. Sadly, no further thought has been put into the logic of how such a universe would function.

For instance, the biggest threat to the entire cast of characters is the prospect of their own machine being taken out of service. This, it is hammered home throughout the film, is essentially the same as death.

And yet no one seems worried about the prospect of a power cut or some other apocalyptic event such as (the horror!) someone switching the plugs off. Surely the arcade owner and software designers should be in cahoots with Ralph and his colleagues for such an elaborate infrastructure to operate? And what purpose does their slavery to electronic entertainment serve anyway? None of this is addressed, so *Wreck-It Ralph* takes one hell of a basic concept and runs it into the ground by reducing the core story to a crass, mildly depressing morality tale about being grateful with whatever terrible cards you're dealt in life.

This cynicism pervades throughout: a good chunk of the action takes place inside a videogame called *Super Smash*, a sort of Mario

Kart clone set in a very fluffy, very pink world of sugar mountains and candy canes. Sadly, it's just a handy platform for some hardcore product placement, including a particularly trashy/wincey endorsement for M&M's and Coca-Cola (you can probably guess how they're utilized).

Still, there are some decent gags and neat little touches. The appearance of the '80s paragon Ken Q-bert at a key story moment is surprisingly delightful and the misused hat-tips to gaming history will have nerds in hysterics. But *Wreck-It Ralph* is B-grade Disney: more *Chicken Little* than *Woody and Buzz*. **CHRIS BLOOM**

ANTICIPATION. Achievement Unlocked? The prospect of some of gaming's most loved characters coming together is an enticing one.

3

ENJOYMENT. Try *Angus & Thong*! Confusing and cynical, the film fails to deliver on its stimulating premise.

2

IN RETROSPECT. *Game Over!* Play an actual videogame instead.

2



Bullhead

Directed by MICHAEL R. ROSKAM

Starring MATTHIAS SCHOENAERTS, JEROEN PERCEVAL, JEANNE DANDOY

Releaved 25 JANUARY

Behold the latest installment of hyper-masculine embrace cinema! Quite literally fueled by an excess of testosterone, *Bullhead* is ready-made for those who swooned more of a third act to *Drive*. Beginning with the standard 'you're fucked from cradle to grave' narration and featuring the impressive (yet ultimately unexpressed) physicality of Matthias Schoenaerts (*Rust And Bone*), this buxonic tragedy details the illegal hormone obsessions of Flemish cow farmer Shadow, underdeveloped quaffs about smelter podiums across steak dinners, shots are fired and heads are smashed into cow shit, all in the name of making larger product to compete with 'The Hormonic States of America.'

Who is involved, what they're actually doing and how any of this could possibly be worth their trouble alternates between unclear and dull, but that's not the only source of dramatic tension. In what could well be the least subtle national allegory ever committed to film, an awkwardly placed, extended flashback reveals why protagonist Jacky (Schoenaerts) is obsessed with beefing up just as he was beginning to develop sexually, his balls were irrevocably smashed with a rock by a deranged French kid. (Isn't that how we all remember these years?)

As these *Wallbros* had a vague knowledge of his family's recent dealings with illegal growth hormones, the incident was reported to the authorities as an accident. Now in his thirties and ruthless, Jacky believes his time by languidly staring at his brother's wife and children, using illegal injectibles to maintain his size and stalking Lucie (Jeanne Dandoy), the sister of the guy who turned him into Tim Monster.

Despite being a study of wounded masculinity, gallantly toting Lucie manages to be the most believable and well-written character initially charmed by Jacky's awkward silence, she quickly puts the absurd happenings behind her and tries to get on. By contrast, Diederik Jeroen Perceval, Jacky's childhood friend who witnessed the beating and is now working as a police informant, is a lame caricature of a closeted homosexual, clumsily harassing every man who gets too close to him, present only for the sake of counter-example. But what would you expect from a director whose credits include an adaptation of Hemingway's *Bully In Paris*?

The meanness that permeates the script — be it in the fundamental absurdity of the story and characters, its muddled plotting or dumb denouement — is blessedly not repeated visually. Cinematographer Nicolas Kosterbaum is equally adept at rendering the

Flemish landscape in soft, melancholy tones as he is conveying the intensity or claustrophobia of small interior spaces. The subtlety achieved by his lighting and palette is increasingly rare on film or digital stock and breathtaking enough to warrant a second-viewing with the sound muted and subtitles off. For all its forceful bluster, moments of silence or near-silence — as Jacky aggressively shadow-boxes Lucie, alone in his room, or as he sticks unlabeled needles into the flawless skin of his thighs — most compellingly evoke the distance and emotion of his trauma. It seems as though it's still, the strong, silent type that wins out in the end. Now unfortunate. **VIOLETTUCCA**

ANTICIPATION. *Hey, aren't I hot*
The excellent Matthias Schoenaerts
from *Rust And Bone*?

3

ENJOYMENT. *It sure looks pretty*
Shame about the garbled story and
hackneyed characterisation

2

IN RETROSPECT. *There's not*
quite enough in here to justify
a second sweep

2



V/H/S

Directed by MATT BETTINELLI OLPIN, DAVID BRUCKNER, TYLER GILLETT, JUSTIN MARTINEZ, RADIO SILENCE, GLENN MCQUAID, JOE SWANBERG, CHAD VILLELLA, TI WEST, ADAM WINGARD

Starring CALVIN REEDER, LANE HUGHES, ADAM WINGARD

Released 18 JANUARY

If two words above all others can be guaranteed to inspire trepidation in the minds of cinema audiences and marketers alike, then they must surely be 'horror anthology'. A subgenre beset by half-assedness and failure (see opposite), its ill reputation is owed only by the equally indefensible filmmaking disciplines of found footage and mock-documentary. In which case, spare a thought for the hot office unitelions of Sundance sensation V/H/S which subcribes to all three of these cursed classifications.

The film's opening minutes set the tone for what's to come, as a gang of uniformly brutish, casually misogynistic young men take a break from their day job as producers of online 'shocking porn', in which they loathfully expose vulnerable young women in secluded public spaces, to become burglars-for-hire. Their mission — to break into an abandoned house and recover a single videotape for a mysterious and anonymous benefactor — seems simple enough. But things soon take a turn for the horrific (and anthropological) as they begin to trawl through some of the other tapes that litter the property, each of which documents a tale of hubristic excess and gruesome consequences, shot with the same rough-and-

ready handheld aesthetic as the gang's own morally dubious output.

Remarkably, given the premise, only one of the five short segments that make up V/H/S is an outright failure. The others — from such US indie darlings as *Moon* Gf The Dead director Ti West, mock-documentary luminary Joe Swanberg and fledgling YouTube collective Radio Silence — show an experimental bent, a knack for well-timed twists and they don't ponder to the squeamish. It puts these spooky menagerie head and shoulders above the bulk of this year's festival-length horror fare. One particularly unique spin on the creative-feature genre, from little-known commercial director David Bruckner, packs more genuine emotion into its 20 minutes than the *Paranormal Activity* sequels have managed in a cumulative five hours.

With few constraints in place and a collective thirst for originality, it's hardly surprising that the directors occasionally lapse into indulgence and there isn't a film in the bunch that wouldn't benefit from having a few minutes shaved off its runtime. Pacing, too, often takes a backseat to the demands of the film's more laboured flights of fancy. The devil is in these details and others, not least the film's decidedly lacklustre

performances which — judging by the Blair Witchian meanderings of 9-hours that litter the dialogue — appear to have been partly, and unsurprisingly, improvised.

V/H/S's quotient of horror upstarts soon unlikely to lose much sleep over those minor quibbles, more concerned as they are with the big ideas at the core of their wildly idiosyncratic creations. Forever chasing scores both cerebral and visceral, the filmmakers leave little space for cynicism and plenty for admiration — an admirable accomplishment in a film form that's so susceptible to weak spots. **CHARLELYNNE**

ANTICIPATION. *A found-footage, mock-documentary anthology movie, you say? Tell us less*

2

ENJOYMENT. *We've come a long way since Creepshow*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *Spectacular bits and forgettable misfires make this a rarefire can't-be-for-eat status*

4

The Horror Anthology

With a sequel to this month's *W/N/S* already being hurried into production and the release of 26-part, alphabetically-inspired perambulations *The ABCs Of Death* around the corner, the horror anthology is back to its best. Matt Thrift lists five of the absolute essentials.

Dead Of Night (1945)

From the opening beats of its connecting narrative to the stunningly executed waking nightmare of its finale, few horror anthologies can touch *Dead Of Night* when it comes to structural complexity and thematic cohesion. It begins with a premonitory music brochure, setting the stage for a series of increasingly dark and damaged stories, all told to visiting architect Marcelo Jahn as a means of getting to the bottom of his extra-sensory case of déjà vu. Taking us flashback-within-flashback and tales-within-tales, all harking back to the linking narrative, this masterpiece in psychological suspense culminates with one of the most celebrated single sections of any anthology film, anti-scripted psychodrama tells of a ventriloquist (Michael Redgrave, remarkable) who believes his dummy to be conspiring against him.

Three Cases Of Murder (1955)

A forgotten stepping stone between *Dead Of Night* and the major wave of British horror anthologies produced by Amicus Studios in the 1960s, *Three Cases Of Murder* (available on UK DVD) is a real find. A ropey introductory sequence from Rianannon 'This Is Your Life' Andrews aside, two of the three segments are as good as isolated scary bits. *Dead Of Night* the last featuring a magnificent turn by Orson Welles. While 'Weller' episode is often as wickedly funny as it is eccentrically creepy, telling of an

MP whose nightmares of public humiliation begin to bleed into reality, the real stars of *Three Cases Of Murder* prove to be the brilliant Alan Badel (starring in each section) and unheralded British filmmaker Wendy Toye, responsible for the film's stunning opener. *The Picture* is an icy, beautifully crafted child-in-narrator which also boasts some remarkable technical razzle-dazzle. On the basis of her episode, Toye is a director who warrants further investigation.



Destiny (1921)

At its best during the opening and closing sequences which bookend a trio of tales. Fritz Lang's *Destiny* is a film of exquisite melancholy and achingly beautiful visuals. It's really the strongest of the early wave of German anthologies. With more than a slight case of the Carl Theodor Dreyer about it, *Destiny* tells of Death's arrival at a quiet hamlet, where he makes a bed for an

ance of land next to the village cemetery, wailing it up as a portal to the afterlife. Summed up in its original title, *The Womans Of Death*, it sees the Reaper telling a scandal, newlywed woman of his cursed task. He begs that she use any of the three lives (which make up the three history-spanning tales) we are duly presented her. In return, she'll get back the life of her recently deceased husband. Kosher yet transcendent in its final moments, Lang's film is a little-seen masterpiece, as deserving of attention (and a UK DVD release) as his more famous and celebrated silent epic.

Black Sabbath (1963)

Occupying and amplifying the space between Hitchcock and De Palma years before Dario Argento claimed it as his own, the slithering density of Mario Bava's camera in the opening beats of *Black Sabbath* immediately signify a master stylist at work. If anything, the film is an exercise in hyper stylisation. From the instantly Freudian colour schemes of the opening galle to the expressionistic stache-dot 'visions' of the finale (that also bring to mind Masaki Kobayashi's amazing 1964 anthology *Kwaidan*), Bava ramps everything up to 11, and it's all the more exhilarating for it. Yet this sensory explosion is peely served on home video, still only available as part of an Australian and (out-of-print) UK boxset. Often terrifying but also machiavellianly self-aware, it's a film in which a knowing wink from the horror maestro is never far away. This finds its most explicit expression during Boris Karloff's closing epilogue, when the camera pulls back to reveal the crew at work, synthesising terror under the watchful eye of a master puppeteer.

Need to Adrenaline tales made for an extended Deep Research article with more juicy horror anthology goodness



Flight

Directed by **ROBERT ZEMECKIS**

Starring **DENZEL WASHINGTON, KELLY REILLY, DON CHADLER**

Releaved **1 FEBRUARY**

Just before he disappeared from reality to explore the uncanny valley (*The Polar Express*, *Beowulf*), A Christmas Carol, CG pioneer Robert Zemeckis left us with a powerful human drama, a great lead performance and possibly the most harrowing plane crash in cinema history.

Twelve years after *Castaway*, he's back — and he's done it again. *Flight*'s opening scene sees Whip Whitaker (Denzel Washington) stumble out of bed with a skull-busting hangover after a no-sleep night of sex'n substances with a naked stewardess. He hops back the drop of a beat, vomits another line of cocaine, dons his airline pilot's cap and heads for his 747. Gulp.

Pepped by two, flight vodka, alcohol on the oxygen mask and a mid-air smoke at the stick, Whip's flying high. Until his world turns upside down: rams horn, hydraulics failure, engines on fire, his plane plummeting into an uncontrolled dive. Marshaling a sequence of terrifyingly convincing FX wizardry and bucking the tension tight, Zemeckis gives us a white-knuckle nightmare of 20,000ft. Somehow we're flitting with drugs and drink, ice-man Whip pulls off a miracle — clipping the steeple of a church, no less — to make an impossible emergency crash-landing that saves 96 lives.

It's an unforgettable opener and, perhaps unsurprisingly, *Flight* never hits that altitude again. Having pulled off a miracle in the heavens, Whip must now face his demons on Earth and Zemeckis' film gradually levels off into a strong, steady addiction drama about a man whose most heroic deed may have sprung from his worst flaw.

It's a provocative concept for a character study, but the film's familiar flightlog (scripted by *Twister*'s John Gatins) never engrosses half as much as Washington's performance. With a couple of exceptions, *DW* has been cranking since winning an Oscar for *Training Day*, but here the 57-year-old reminds us that he's one of the few leading men in Hollywood who can carry an entire film.

Building his performance from within, he gives us a bold, bruising portrait of a soul on free fall — a man trying, and failing, to do the right thing — that becomes the film's headiest spectacle. *Flight* loses in Washington almost as he only as *Castaway* did in Hanks and Zemeckis proves (if only to himself) that synopses can't touch the real thing.

There's eye-catching support from James Badge Dale's cocaine man, Bruce Greenwood's God-fearing co-pilot, Bruce Greenwood's union rep

and Don Chadler is slick as the hotshot lawyer hired to bury Whip's party-boy medical reports. On the flip, Kelly Reilly is landed with a stock police who attempt to drag Whip to rehab, while John Goodman's *Lebowski*-esque drag dealer is a cryoan cartoon-character perfectly suited to *Sympathy For The Devil*.

It's frustrating to find the film's seriousness sandbagged by these crude clichés and, at nearly two and a half hours, *Flight* takes a little too long to bring us home. But Zemeckis and Washington land it safely, leaving us with a finale that again matches redemption from disaster. **JOVANNI CRONKER**

ANTICIPATION. *Twining is far another Denzel drama? Not cruise control*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Bruce! Bruce! Smart entertainment from Zemeckis, superior acting from DW!*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *It's funny how falling feels like flying... for a little while.*

3



To The Wonder

Directed by **TERRENCE MALICK**
 Starring **OLGA KURYLENKO, BEN AFFLECK, JAVIER BARDEM**
 Released **22 FEBRUARY**

REVIEW

During the press tour for his second season hit *Argo*, Ben Affleck—clearly off his rocker on muted critical embraces—cackled lamely that he had starred in the only bad Terrence Malick movie. Dearest Ben, if you ever, in just a single frame of your directorial career, manage to match the lead of exquisite formal refinement that *To The Wonder* blithely exhibits with concrete given, then we'll apologize that one-idea Mayke.

It's been referred to as a "3-side" to *The Tree of Life*'s operatic prize cut, but that description refers that *To The Wonder* is some kind of fancy doodle not deemed good enough as a standalone work. No, these two films operate better as a monumental double *A-side*, both evolved out of the same mystic providential yolk and constructed with an incessant repair fluff bound to leave the righteous slack-jawed in awe.

While *Tree Of Life* presented Earth as a place of rhapsodic enchantment, *To The Wonder* gives us a modern-day world on the cusp of devastation. Taking place among the prehistoric houses of a dusty Gushueville being where every hour is magic hour, *To The Wonder* is less interested in the consolation of reparability and the dynamics of love than it is the emotional barricades that prevent us from living a life of sublime indifference.

Affleck essays Neil, a commitment shy environmental health officer whose internal anxieties prevent him from truly accepting childlike Russian-French nymphet Marina (Olga Kurylenko) into his cold heart. A patina of dread and dispassion—both spoken and concealed—erases the actors. Characters grapple with metaphysical conundrums and paradoxical beauties to come to terms with the preciousness of existence. They even begin to realize that the universal constant of romantic relationships may just be losing its place at the top of the chain of human responsibility.

With this more mundanely done and subtly evoked affair, Malick again acts as head curator of a lacustrine folk-book of divine images, all of which have been immaculately best matched with the breathtaking, elliptical editing. This partner in cinematographic crime, Emmanuel 'Clavo' Lubecki, locates tumbling cosmic depths in the most mundane of moments: a meadow's smiling horizon mutates into a vision of chaos and claustrophobia, the shifting sands near Haut Saint-Michel, a night time visit to a washing-machine outlet becomes a trial of enforced domesticity, Marina euphorically flits, jerks and gestures, her figure of innocence a physical manifestation of the idea that Neil is unable to get close to her, to consume her.

Weaving in tandem to this is the story of a priest (Javier Bardem) who's straying from the flock. He surveys the lives of impoverished locals just as Neil finds toxic chemicals leaking from local industrial plants. *To The Wonder* ponders how different life might be if we could comprehend the awesomeness of a world we take for granted. We might wrestle with our own doubts about this film, but how fitting is that for a film about doubt?

Its utter earnestness leaves it wide open to criticism, but to borrow the superficial quality of the performances, the script or the story would be to miss the point of the film entirely. Malick doesn't make films anymore. He builds cathedrals. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *The negative buzz could be beefed for and wife from an Antenna festival premiere*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Erm, and what's the problem exactly? This is cinema sent from the heavens*

5

IN RETROSPECT. *Five viewings should just about cover it.*

5



What Richard Did

Directed by **Lenny Abrahamson**

Starring **JACK REYNOR, RÓISÍN MURPHY, SAM KEELEY**

Released **11 JANUARY**

Lenny Abrahamson's two previous directorial efforts could be framed as a kind of Dickensian, 'Tale Of Two Cities'-style exploration of contemporary Dublin, functioning as a response to Ireland's recent political and economic trajectory. Abrahamson's films jump between Dublin's social poles. In the boom years, he made *Adam And Paul*, a film about two junkies meandering through the city and looking for a fix. It's an oddly twee allegorical comedy about the capital's drug-addled underclass, those that the tiger had left behind.

In *What Richard Did*, Abrahamson's latest film, he settles into the achingly middle-class world of South Dublin, and as Ireland teeters on the brink of economic collapse, tells the story of a group of rich kids for whom this wider context is irrelevant. Only their drunken games and nights out at the pub seem to matter, but as the inevitable happens and their blinkered complacency results in tragedy, is this a frighteningly brutal parable of our times?

Richard, played with maturity beyond his years by newcomer Jack Reynor is a popular,

wealthy 18-year-old. For the first third of the film we follow him as he hosts parties at his parents' beach house, meets up with friends and courts a beautiful young girl away from a member of his rugby team. Abrahamson's pacing is slow, measured, verging on contrived. The camera sits on Richard's face for extended lengths of time, forcing the idea upon us that he is thoughtful, that these encounters are all superficial to him. There's a sinister sense of nothingness which hangs over this first half of the narrative, propelled only by the reassurance of a title that assures Richard will indeed do something.

When tragedy finally strikes – a boat on his rival's head after a fraught house party – Abrahamson's subtle political critique comes into play. Richard lies to the police and coerces his friends into protecting him. Seemingly all is how incredibly mundane it all is. There is no great act of violence, no redemption, not even a change of pace, just a blinkered gang of kids with an unflinching sense of entitlement.

Richard's moral choices remain ambiguous – will he confess or not? Abrahamson demonstrates that these lives skim across the surface of something more sinister, something rotten at the core of society. Though he's no clearer than that. Loosely based on true events that were chronicled in Kevin Power's book, *Red Day In Blackrock*, Abrahamson's film is an eye-opening, thoughtful, if occasionally bring investigation into a new brand of contemporary nihilism. **RYAN LEE/WANDERLUSTCUMMINGS**

IN ANTICIPATION. *More Adam And Paul-style high jinx?* **3**

ENJOYMENT. *Frustratingly slow and self-avowed. But thoughtful and detailed, too.* **3**

IN RETROSPECT. *It grows on you – afterwards, but is perhaps an acquired taste.* **3**



Song For Marion

Directed by **PAUL ANDREW WILLIAMS**
 Starring **TERRENCE STAMP, VANESSA REDGRAVE, GEMMA ARTERTON**
 Released **8 FEBRUARY**

That the elderly are a demographic under-represented on screen is difficult to ignore. So when a film comes along that provides compassionately written, deftly executed parts for two remarkable actors in their twilight years, we've every reason to be as grateful as ever for Michael Blanks. For those, on the other hand, with an aversion to the chills of an Austrian winter or who felt that his *Amor* perhaps lacked a certain seasoning, they'll be pleased to know that all the Salt N' Peppa they need can be found in writer/director Paul Andrew Williams' *Song For Marion*.

All factiousness aside, if his fourth (and most eager to please) feature remains light years away in both tone and quality from the hearting immediacy of his 2006 debut *London To Brighton*, it at least represents a discovery of the cross-control switch after the aggressive swerving between the *Early Man* headline montage of Cherry Tree Lane and the challenge pile-up that was *The Outrage*.

Unashamedly manipulative and curiously transparent, Williams benefits enormously here from the committed performances of his septuagenarian leads, even as he struggles to find a balance in tone between the bittersweet comeliness of his storytelling and the often striking nuances evident when *Song For Marion* is at its best. For every scene of

broad, emotive mapping from members of the background cast during a *Oliver* inspired choir practice to which Arthur (Terrence Stamp) takes his dying wife Marion (Vanessa Redgrave) at the local community centre, there's another of truthful, genuinely felt tenderness when the couple are alone. It's during these moments away from the IKEA flatpack plot mechanics, that Williams goes some way to earning the sentiment into which the film slides as it progresses, albeit less through his functional writing than through the spaces in-between, elegantly filled by his quiet brilliant leads.

Elsewhere, supporting characters fare less well. Gemma Arterton's angelic choir leader is charming enough in a one-note role, but an unseasoned rightship with Arthur after a miserable date early reveals itself to be merely an awkward attempt at character shading. The difficult relationship between Arthur and his increasingly estranged son James (Christopher Eccleston) outside the credits in Williams' writing the most however, quickly finding itself held up in corners with nowhere to go.

That said, the film filmmaker often has a keen eye for a composition, his widescreen framing at its most effective in a particular shot split down the centre by a dividing wall in the couple's home. As James is missing around with his young

daughter in the kitchen, Arthur struggles to take an exhausted Marion to bed, his stooped frame as he exits the room a heart-breaking picture of a man bearing the weight of his wife's imminent death alone as his family play-out door.

If the film's later emotional beats play the audience like a cheap violin, it's almost entirely down to Redgrave and Stamp that one might be inclined to forgive Williams the indulgence. As good as Redgrave is throughout (and her solo rendition of *True Colours* makes for a truly touching scene), this is ultimately Terrence Stamp's show. It was 1999 when he told us to "Tell 'em I'm fucking coming!" and while it may have taken him 14 years to get here, boy is he back. **NOTHING**

ANTICIPATION. The director of London To Brighton delivers his sopping groovy movie

2

ENJOYMENT. Cheese grabs Stamp great. In fact, he's magnificent.

3

IN RETROSPECT. Too emotionally manipulative, but not without its moments of real tenderness and warmth.

2

Hors Satan

Directed by BRUNO DUMONT

Starring DAVID DEWAERLE, ALEXANDRA LEMAITRE, CHRISTOPHE BON

Released 4 JANUARY

Here are some questions which probably wouldn't come up during the career of such a Belgian provocateur: Bruno Dumont. On *La Vie de Jésus*, "Why are these boys so violent and revolting?" On *L'Amant*, "Why is that rural boy so lecherous?" On *Twentynine Palms*, "Why is that man howling like a wolf during sex?" And on *Mulhijah*, "Why is that young man embracing Islam?" It's this persistent recourse to 'why' that makes Dumont such a vital and necessary presence on the current cinematic landscape.

With *Hors Satan*, his most poetically and spirally opaque film to date, we're invited to question every scene, every line of dialogue, every facial expression and every suggestive, possibly random shot taken by the plot - if you can even call it a plot. Actor David Dewaele steps into the dusty boots of an unnamed man who, it transpires, is also some kind of peasant cop. He kills and he saves, with his efforts dictated by the tentative want of a pretty girl (Alexandra Lemaître) who sends him secret food parcels. The pair tramp the majestic pastoral expanses of Northern French Opél Coast, their bond appearing to be nothing more than phantoms, but perhaps more deeper than romance once.

Even though Dewaele doesn't cut much of a muscular figure, there's an ill-fated-like intensity to the passive, hair-trigger violence he administers to anyone who crosses his path. Yet he's also called upon as an exeunt and antidote, adding the spiritual persistence from a young girl's soul with a disturbing month-to-month ritual. Dumont appears entirely disinterested in basic continuity and tracing the social consequences of dramatic events, and that's because his film is about formulating a credible set of moral questions relating to the actions of a man in possession of supernatural powers.

He murders and mutilates, but in doing so is simply protecting his province. What may look vile and unjust to a spectator is perhaps an act of unyielding kindness from the perspective of his charge. When going to meet another sexually abusive park ranger or violent rustic patriarch? *Hors Satan* is an investigation into the elusive nature of good and evil, possibly even

suggesting that every supposedly idyllic act will have its worst happenings.

The notion of viewing extreme polar opposites as one and the same permeates the film as whole. The landscape shots, captured with the aid of supremely gifted cinematographer Yves Gape are often breathtaking. The monumental Cinemascope vista in which two figures traverse the verdant, rolling hills as the gossy twilight filters up from the horizon could go toe-to-toe with *Black is the new pump*. Move in closer and that awesome beauty dissipates instantly. The squallid undergrowth feels dark and forbidding, that sense of boundless freedom now turned to claustrophobia and fear.

And in that spirit, *Hors Satan* will likely divide audiences between lovers and haters. Within Dumont's back catalogue, it's a film which feels tacitly connected to his contentious 2000 Cannes prize-winner, *L'Amant*, in which a persecuted, passionless murder investigation takes back seat to a impressionistic portrait of a man who may be some kind of deity. If you're a reader for basic logic, this one will most likely infuriate. But if you're interested in looking questions pertaining to a higher power which are articulated in near-abstract terms, then you could do a lot worse than choose to worship at the altar of Dumont. **DWIG JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *Bruno Dumont is nothing if not reliably contentious. And that's why we love him*

4

ENJOYMENT. *Another interpretation into the spiritual sublime which will split audiences down the middle. We think it's hands bra'vrrrr!*

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Not everyone will want to go back for more, but those who do will find rich rewards*

4



The Pitch: Die Hard 6

A new *Die Hard* film is released in the UK on 14 February and has been given the stretching-it-a-bit title of *A Good Day To Die Hard*. In it, Bruce Willis' strapping copper John McClane has to take on the Russians and prevent nuclear war, etc. But EWLive got a sneak peek inside a top secret Hollywood dossier which contained potential details of McClane's future adventures.

Title: *Die Hard: Bermuda Die-Angle*

When his daughter Lucy (played by a new Internet TV sock puppet) gets engaged to the son of a tin-dodging billionaire Mitteleuropean financier (read: Asian dealer) played by Christoph Waltz, sorry-heavy Irish cousin John McClane - now working as a HR Compliance Officer for Chuck E Cheese - begrudgingly toadies down to Bermuda for the wedding. Sadly, the ceremony soon goes all KTV R/N November Rain and the bride-to-be is abducted by a platoon of Nam storm-troopers freshly sprung from the time-dating netherworld of the Bermuda Triangle. Deified to a deity, Bruce manfully smashes his straitjacketed body with some prototype jet-line golf and paralyzes into the void with naught but a "Gipper-to-ya!" and some struffed asparagus as to his agent's percentage. Mayhem ensues.

Title: *Tie-Dye Or Dye Tryin'*

The film opens with John McClane being handed a gold watch and then ushered out to the green pastures of retirement. He makes the calculations and realizes he can afford to sell off his Brooklyn shithole and invest in a nice little beachside condo on an island resort in Thailand. But when he arrives, disaster strikes, as the realtor fails to mention that his property now slap bang next to an 'organic farm'/hippy commune populated by macho-chad Earthmothers, and John's twilight years are ruined by ten truck-sprawling, wall-to-wall shamanic chanting and the thick fog of reffer

smoke. It's only when the leader of the commune - a strangely smug Eurotrash wannabe calling himself Pierre (played by Christoph Waltz) - that McClane decides to join, but only with the intention of tearing down this hemp-enslaved edifice from the inside.



Title: *Surf Nazis Must Die Hard*

After accidentally leveling an orphanage for excessively cute children when trying to cuff an innocent and honest carpenter, McClane is busted down to rookie status and is posted as on-site security for a low-budget exploitation horror movie filming in New York. The production's strongly retrovert Eurotrash director (played by Christoph Waltz) tries to coerce McClane into becoming a background artist, but he resists. Their game of psychological out-and-mouse continues, though McClane

soon realizes that as the days roll on, the crew appears to be thinning out. Only then does it transpire that Waltz is actually orchestrating a bizarre, City-wide gonzo snuff movie. McClane kills everyone involved.

Title: *Being John McClane*

It had to happen. With John McClane involved in so many episodes of high-profile festive carnage, it was only a matter of time before Hollywood came a-crawling. After losing the rights to his life story in a backroom poker game to a man known only as 'Paddy the Greek', John finds himself at the whim of Tinseltown, who package the events of the original *Die Hard* as a postmodern deconstruction of the action movie, directed by Spike Jonze and starring Christoph Waltz as John McClane. Posters and TV ads bearing a fictional dopplegänger begin to plague McClane, sending him to the brink of insanity. The cloning shoot witnesses him fully deranged, releasing himself over an image of Waltz plastered over the side of a bus, whilst repeatedly singing the theme tune from *Fraser*.

Title: *Die Hard: The Day After*

We return to LA's Nakatomi Plaza on the day after that fateful night. The menzies are in the morgue, McClane's patching up his wounds and mauling nog with his mimes while Hans Gruber's blood-black extrude paint the pavement below like some abstract expressionist nightmare. But what of the day labourers, the Mexican border jumpers or Russian serfs who are employed by (the late) Mr Takagi to ensure the smooth running of the building? This sinister new *Die Hard* offshoot documents the toil of those below stairs and the harsh realities of life among up after a workplace massacre. So painful and arduous is the workers' task of mopping up the acorns of blood that, in an ironic twist, they too find by Christoph Waltz decide to pool up and shoot up their own skyscraper. ☹

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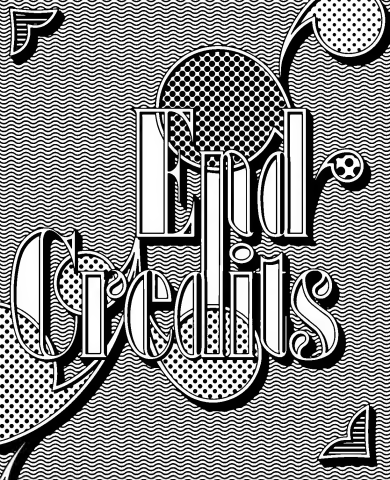
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What do you love about movies?

Quentin Tarantino
Deb. Haha... Well, um... Okay, yeah. So, the thing is, you ask me that question, over the course of my life, it's probably be different answers. That's what's interesting, I guess. I think maybe eight years ago, I might have said the storytelling aspect of it. But now, it's the artform. It would be the most itself. When I kind of enjoy movies the most now, is when I get that voracious aspect of going through a career or a genre or a country's cinema. This grand cinematic that goes on my whole life.

